

26 November 2020

Dear Family Member

CARE HOME VISITING UPDATE

New national guidance on visiting for care homes was published on 5 November 2020. It recognises the benefits of visiting on wellbeing and quality of life for residents, but also highlights the continued risk to health of Covid-19 for both residents and staff in care homes.

Over the last few months care homes have used different virtual ways of helping residents and families to stay in touch. These remain the safest form of contact during the Covid-19 pandemic. However we understand how difficult it has been for some of our residents and their families with the lack of in-person contact. All of our care homes are now working hard to put in place arrangements to support safe visits where possible, in line with the national guidance.

As part of this, care homes need to take account of the guidance from our local Director of Public Health. Dr Justin Varney has highlighted that levels of Covid-19 remain high in Birmingham and there is significant spread through everyday social contact, as well as a large number of Covid-19 cases in our care homes already. We are as keen as we are sure you are, to do everything possible to keep our residents, families and care home staff safe during this time.

Each care home is different, but they are all working hard to put in place the necessary procedures and policies to arrange safe visiting as soon as possible. Some care homes currently have Covid-19 outbreaks, so they will not be able to offer visits at this time (apart from in exceptional circumstances). However, please be assured that as soon as it is safe to do so and care homes are Covid-free they will be working to open for visits safely.

We need to ask for your help and would like to highlight a few key points

- Virtual visits remain the safest form of communication
- If you are planning to visit, the care home will need to limit this to a single constant visitor wherever possible, with a recommended maximum of 2 constant visitors. This reduces the risk of spread of Covid-19.
- All visits must be arranged in advance, so that the correct facilities are available – please contact the care home directly to enquire and make arrangements
- You must not visit if you have any symptoms of Covid-19 or other infectious illness (such as a cold, flu, diarrhoea or vomiting).
- You must not visit if you have tested positive for Covid-19, if anyone else in your household has symptoms or has tested positive for Covid-19, or if you have been in contact with anyone who has tested positive or been told by NHS Test and Trace to isolate. Please complete your isolation period first. This is really important to protect residents and staff.
- The care home will have in place a number of measures to reduce the risk of spreading any infections, please follow these measures and ask the home if you are unsure.

If the care home does have any outbreaks of Covid-19 they will need to suspend visiting until they are Covid-free for 28 days, under the guidance of Public Health England (except in exceptional circumstances such as end of life).

Care homes will have visiting policies which will give advice on how to prepare for a visit, please discuss any concerns with your care home. If you need any more information on care home visiting during Covid-19, Healthwatch have produced a really useful guide:

<https://www.healthwatch.co.uk/advice-and-information/2020-07-24/what-you-need-know-when-visiting-care-home-new-guidance-covid-19>

Healthwatch Birmingham are also happy to receive any feedback about any visits you make to care homes, in particular anything that has gone well or anything you are concerned about, please call 0800 652 5278 / 0121 636 0990.

The Council also has a dedicated whistleblowing helpline that you can use to raise any concerns about Covid-19 working practices in care homes: <https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/xfp/form/762>. If you are unable to use this form then please call 0121 303 1116.

Visits to care homes are being carefully controlled, based on ongoing assessment of risks. Arrangements will be subject to the specific circumstances in the care home and those living and working in it.

We will continue to follow the national and local guidance on visiting, and will review this current guidance at the end of lockdown. We would like to thank you for your patience and support over the last few months to keep our vulnerable residents safe and to reduce the spread of Covid-19. Finally we ask for your patience with care homes while they get things in place to enable safe visiting and for those that may be experiencing outbreaks and cannot currently support safe visiting.

Yours sincerely



Dr Justin Varney
Director of Public Health



Professor Graeme Betts
Director of Adult Social Care