

Framework for Care home visits.

Version agreed: 30/07/20

The Government policy issued on 22nd July 2020 gives the Director of Public Health and Local Authorities the responsibility to advise care homes in our Local Authority areas on the current levels of infections and the suitability of whether care homes can allow visitors to their residents (see link below)

Lockdown has been challenging for residents, their families and staff in care homes as many people have been unable to visit their loved ones in person for a considerable time. Now that the COVID-19 infection rates are much lower, with reduced transmission in communities, we must seek to balance the benefits to the wellbeing of residents and their family given by visits, against the risk of visitors introducing infection into the care home, or spreading infection from the care home to the community.

In order to enable visits to take place for residents in care homes we need to be confident that all measures are in place to protect our vulnerable residents and staff wherever possible. This will need to be an ongoing risk assessment, guided by regular updates on COVID-19 infection rates locally.

The Framework by which we assess the suitability of visiting for Care Homes is as follows:

Local Epidemiology:

- 1) Continued low numbers of positive COVID-19 test results being reported in BCP and Dorset Local Authority areas. This will be based on the number of positive cases in the past 5 days and the Local Authority exceedance reports produced by Public Health England.
- 2) Continued low rates of positivity in local testing data, including Pillar 1 and 2 testing.

This data is reviewed on an ongoing basis with routine weekly updates available on the Public Health Dorset website (see future assessments below).

Context of Care homes:

- 1) Absence of COVID-19 positive cases.
- 2) Absence of suspected cases undergoing and awaiting test results.
- 3) Care home provides regular assurance around availability of workforce, PPE and completion of Infection Prevention and Control training by completing the national Capacity tracker and/or through discussions with the Quality and Commissioning Teams.
- 4) The care home has a risk assessment for their visitor arrangements which are in line with the national guidance.
- 5) The care home keeps a temporary list of contact details of visitors in addition to staff and residents to facilitate Test and Trace.
- 6) The care home follows a good practice approach to regular staff testing and whole home testing, especially in the context of any outbreak.

Current situation (30th July 2020)

Due to the current low incidence of COVID-19 in our community and lack of outbreaks within our Local Authority areas, the Director of Public Health, Sam Crowe, indicates that so long as Care homes can fulfil the above criteria, it would be safe to allow care homes to facilitate visits to their residents. This is on the condition that they are able to do this safely in line with the Government guidelines as listed in the policy document linked below.

Each Care home will need to produce their own risk assessment and visitor policy and this should be made available and communicated to residents and families. To further support providers, the Care Provider Alliance have published a sector-led [protocol for enabling visiting](#) based on this model.

The decision on whether or not to allow visitors, and in what circumstances, is an operational decision and therefore ultimately for the provider and managers of each individual setting to make.

Ongoing dynamic risk assessment and future assessments.

In the event of a new suspected or confirmed case in connection with a care home the care home should immediately return to essential visits only (for example, end of life) to protect vulnerable residents, staff and visitors. This would then be reviewed following discussion and risk assessment with the Regional Health Protection team and in the support phone call following a positive notification. In the event of an outbreak in a care home (two or more confirmed cases) visiting restrictions should continue, with care homes setting out alternative options to maintain social contact for their residents.

The Director of Public Health, supported by the Our Dorset COVID-19 Health Protection Board, will review local epidemiology data on an ongoing basis as part of an ongoing risk assessment. Routine updates will be available on the Public Health Dorset website every week at <https://www.publichealthdorset.org.uk/your-health/protecting-your-health/latest-updates-on-covid-19-in-dorset.aspx> and linked through to the existing social care provider communication networks. If a situation develops which needs more rapid intervention an urgent message will be sent to relevant providers.

The national Capacity Tracker will also help inform the director of public health's judgement on whether it is safe to continue with visits, based on a live view of local conditions. Providers are therefore strongly encouraged to continue with regular reporting.

Where, for whatever reason and at any time, an individual or group of care homes is/are considered to need to restrict visiting, either temporarily or permanently, the Director of Public Health will communicate this advice in writing to commissioners of all the relevant care homes, or in the absence of a commissioner, direct to the registered manager as quickly as possible.

Key Reference Document:

National Guidance: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/visiting-care-homes-during-coronavirus/update-on-policies-for-visiting-arrangements-in-care-homes>