

Statement on visiting people living in care homes

The pandemic has brought additional challenges to the social care sector. We know providers continue to do extraordinary work despite the impact of COVID-19 on the well-being of people living and working in care homes. We also recognise the additional pressures of managing increased testing and the roll out of vaccinations.

It is very positive news to hear the announcement that care homes can now facilitate indoor visits for people living in care homes, in addition to outdoor, pod and window visits (with tests required and PPE to be worn inside the care home). Welsh Government's visiting guidance is being updated to reflect this and will remain under review as circumstances change.

We understand providers are rightly cautious about facilitating visiting in order to keep those they care for safe, and we also recognise circumstances are different for each care home. Visits must be risk assessed in this context. However, blanket decisions should not be made against government guidance. Where decisions are being made, whether that is for visiting, testing or vaccinations, the focus must always be on the individual needs and rights of the person receiving care and support.

The importance of visiting

Being able to see family and friends is incredibly important to well-being. The pandemic has made this challenging, but for some people in care settings this has meant being separated and deprived of contact with their family for nearly a year. This has had a harmful impact on the mental health and emotional well-being of many people. This has been on top of seeing friends in the care home taken ill and sometimes dying of COVID-19.

Supporting people's mental well-being is as important as physical well-being and [Welsh Government guidance on visiting](#) is there to enable visits can happen as safely as possible. From March 13 the guidance advises all care homes, except in the event of an active outbreak, should enable indoor, outdoor visiting and 'screened' visits. Even in the event of an active outbreak, visits in exceptional circumstances such as end of life care should **always** be facilitated.

We have heard many examples from across Wales of good practice supporting people to connect with their family. It is more important than ever that there is clear and regular communication between care providers, people living in care homes and their families. We expect everyone to work together to enable visiting, and for this to take place as safely as possible. This protocol helps to set out expectations for visitors, alongside detailed guidance for providers.

Public Health Wales has developed tools to help you risk assess how you can facilitate visiting and advice is available from your local authority or local Incident Management Team.

Concerns

Where we receive information from the public or through whistleblowing that gives us concern, we may undertake an inspection. Information related to visiting which could trigger an inspection includes:

- blanket visiting bans (where there is no active outbreak);
- regular visits in line with national guidance not being facilitated (unless advised it is unsafe to do so);
- people not being effectively supported to communicate with relatives and groups that represent them; or
- people not being allowed to see visiting professionals.