

Visiting your relative or friend living in a care home

Introduction

As has been announced by the Scottish Government, care homes are starting to support residents to see their families in person again. The virus transmits through direct contact with droplets from the respiratory system or where these droplets contaminate objects or surfaces. This is why the wearing of face covering and effective hand hygiene are essential. Our evidence of the virus to date also tells us that people who have no symptoms may have and pass on the virus without knowing, so every care must be taken to prevent the transmission. This is hugely important in a care home setting as our residents remain at a higher risk from Coronavirus (COVID-19) because of their age and/or other medical conditions. Therefore, visits will need to be carefully managed. Our approach will be individualised to ensure:

- the risk of infection is minimised
- the safety of our residents, their visitors, and our staff
- that residents who are Shielding are given additional protection
- opportunities are provided for increasing visits, which are important part of residents' lives

Every person's experience is unique, but we hope this document might help address some of your concerns. If you want more advice, please contact the Home Manager who will be very happy to speak to you.

When visiting will happen

The current proposed phasing of introducing controlled visiting is shown below. Each stage is dependent on guidance from the Scottish Government based on advice of the Scientific Advisory Committee and applies to homes which do not have active outbreaks of COVID-19.

Staged approach to visiting and communal activity

(All stages are dependent on the scientific advice given at the appropriate time)

Stage	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4
Readiness	(prior to any lifting of restrictions)	(Subject to scientific advice)	(from 10 th August Subject to scientific advice)	(Subject to scientific advice)
Visiting	<p>Essential visits only (end of life, stress and distress)</p> <p>Visits to the care home to see loved ones through the window ,planned with the care home staff.</p>	<p>Essential visits</p> <p>Garden visits 1 designated visitor for 30 minutes once a week</p> <p>Visits to the care home to see loved ones through the window, planned with the care home staff</p>	<p>Essential visits</p> <p>Garden visits with 2-3 max visitors from no more than 2 different households at the same time per resident for approx. 30 minutes once a week. (NB for residents who are bed bound or not fit to go outside, this can be undertaken at a window).</p> <p>Indoor visits (1 designated person per visit for approx. 30 minutes once a week.</p> <p>Care homes to develop plans that must be approved by Directors of Public Health by 24th August. If completed before</p>	<p>Essential visits</p> <p>Controlled programme of garden and indoor visits.</p>

			24 th August, indoors visit can commence at an earlier point. (subject to scientific advice.)	
Communal activity	Avoidance of communal areas	Residents' use of outdoor areas in limited numbers. Avoidance of indoor communal areas	Residents' use of outdoor areas in limited numbers. Avoidance of indoor communal areas	Residents use of lounge, communal dining area and outdoors in limited numbers - all with physical distancing, supervision and staff wearing PPE.

Essential visits and designated visitors

The definitions of an essential visit and designated visitor are outlined below. Essential visitors will be permitted throughout all stages of the visiting pathway

Essential visit

An essential visit is one where it is imperative that a friend or relative is supported to see their loved one in the circumstances where their loved one may be dying or in other exceptional circumstances. This should be facilitated by care homes throughout all stages of the visiting pathway.

Designated visitor

A Designated Visitor is someone chosen by the resident who they would like to be their named visitor. This might be a spouse or next of kin or a friend. That person will be the first to visit in the early stages of allowing visiting and the main link to the home for a resident.

Before you visit

Visiting will be arranged with you via the Home Manager. Visits will initially be restricted to one designated person, once per week and for limited periods of time, for approximately 30 minutes (excluding preparation and discussion with staff before and after), at pre-arranged appointments to ensure we limit the number of people in the care home and to allow us time to clean the visiting area between visits. At stage 3 indoor visiting – the designated visitor can alternate between stages and from week to week. However changes should be discussed with the care home.

You must wear a face covering so please bring one with you if possible. If any further Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is required, the care home will provide this for you.

You are asked not to bring in food parcels, flowers, helium balloons and the like. This approach is to reduce the opportunity for the virus to be carried into the care home and being passed unknowingly to your loved one. However it may be possible to bring in an object that you can give to your relative if they have dementia which will remind them of the connection the two of you have. This would need to be something that could be easily sanitised by staff e.g. a meaningful photograph could be laminated or placed into a wipe-able container.

During your visit

It is critically important for the health and wellbeing of your loved one that you **do not visit** if you have been feeling unwell in any way.

You will be asked a series of questions by the staff:

- are you feeling unwell?
- do you have a new/continuous cough?
- have you had any sickness or diarrhoea within the last 48 hours?
- have you noticed a change in your temperature?
- have you noticed a change to your normal sense of taste or smell?
- have you been in contact with anyone suspected as having, or who has tested positive for COVID-19, in the past 14 days?

You will be asked to complete a log book or a form with your contact details; this is to assist Public Health, Trace and Protect colleagues should there be a need to contact you.

A visitors' protocol, which you will be given when you arrive, will explain the things you need to do, e.g. hand washing requirements and wearing a face covering or other Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) if appropriate.

You will be asked to sign that you have understood and agree to the protocol, including the need to wear PPE at all times. The care home will provide the necessary PPE which should be placed in the bin when you leave.

How quickly you can see your family member/friend

We acknowledge and appreciate how supportive families have been during this difficult time and we recognise that you will want to see your relative as soon as possible. Please be patient with our staff while they are facilitating these meetings – resident safety is our priority. Homes have to meet criteria to allow visits and these include :

- being COVID free / or fully recovered from COVID for 28 days
- a risk assessment and visiting protocol has to have been agreed with the local Health Protection team
- care homes must fully participate in resident and staff testing programmes.

What the first visit might be like

When you visit your relative again it may look and feel different from before. Initially visits will take place in the garden where social distancing can be maintained. In the case of inclement weather we may have a gazebo type structure to keep you and your loved one dry.

Initially, as explained above, visitors will be limited to one designated family member. At each stage, when guided by the Scottish Government, this limit will be revised and altered dependent on the outbreak status of the virus and any outbreak within the home

Staff will be with you and your relative during the visit to advise on infection control measures and provide support if needed.

Wearing a face covering

Meeting outside reduces the risk of you passing on the virus but it does not eliminate it completely. It is therefore important that you wear your face covering or mask correctly. Please remember that your loved one may have become used to our staff wearing a mask, although you may need to take time to explain to your friend/relative why you are wearing one.

When wearing a face mask you should:

- speak slightly louder and clearer
- use the tone of your voice to convey your message
- consider writing information down for your relative to read, if they can
- use gestures / signs to communicate
- keep eye contact
- try and wear clothing that your relative may recognise

If your relative/friend wants to cuddle or touch you

One of the hardest aspects of the COVID-19 situation is the need for physical distancing between those of different households, including family members. Not everyone will understand the need to do this and they may want to greet you with some sort of physical contact. This response is understandable after not seeing each other for a long time. Because of this we will need to consider different options to reflect each individual resident, their understanding, needs and rights. It is important that a two metre distance is maintained to protect your loved one, you as the visitor, our staff and the wider community.

A gentle reminder from yourself or a staff member may be all that is required. Should physical contact occur, hand washing before and afterwards is essential.

Is a window visit possible?

A window visit to a care home should be possible where a resident is not fit to go outside for a visit. You will still be asked to wear a face mask.

Will my relative/friend still remember me after all this time?

For many people the worry of a relative who has dementia no longer recognising you can be overwhelming. But it is important to stress that despite the time spent apart many people living with dementia will remember their relatives. However, some people may struggle at first.

If your relative doesn't recognise you straight away, try not to worry and give them time to remember. It may take more than the initial meeting for those memories to be reconnected.

Also, you might need to:

- re-introduce yourself and remind them of the relationship between the two of you
- talk about the distant past first rather than the recent months
- consider taking with you an easily wipe-able object that you can give to your relative with dementia which will remind them of the connection the two of you have.

If, despite all of your attempts your relative doesn't recognise you, remember that they will still benefit from seeing you, hearing your voice and enjoying your company even if they are not sure who you are.

If your relative/friend wants to walk around with you

It is possible that your relative will want to walk with you. It is ok to do this provided you maintain a physical distance of 2 metres.

If your family member's/friend's health has deteriorated since you last saw them

It is possible that your relative's health may have changed. All of us have been affected by the lockdown and this is equally true of residents living in a care home.

For some people there will have been a cognitive decline. These changes in a person's brain, are part of their health journey which continue despite the change and extraordinary times we are all going through.

If your relative's dementia has worsened, you may need to adopt different approaches and communication techniques. Your relative may need longer to respond or need more help to do things. But maintaining that relationship is just as important now as it was before the pandemic.

If you don't feel able to visit

Feeling nervous or anxious about seeing your relative face to face again is a normal response to recent events. Only visit your relative when you feel able to do so and when they agree, as they may also be worried about you coming into the home for your own health.

It is perfectly normal to feel anxious about returning to a place that may have been through such difficult times. The care home itself may have changed significantly since your last visit. Seeing staff in PPE may be a reminder of the impact of COVID-19 on the home. It is likely that over the time you have visited your relative, you have become close to other residents. If these residents have died then it is likely to have an emotional impact on you.

Staff at the home will continue to care for your relative and they will not judge your decision not to visit in person. Alternatives include use of video calls, recorded messages and telephone calls.

When you leave

This will be a difficult moment for both you and your relative. Start preparing 10 minutes before you actually have to leave. Agree, in advance, a time with the Home Manager when you can visit again so you can let your loved one know when to expect you. You could write this down and ask the staff to leave in a place for your relative to refer to. Arranging the date and time of the next visit will create a focus for your relative and you. It will also help to prepare you for ending the visit by preparing for the next one.

At all times our staff are here to help you and our residents; please do not be afraid to speak to staff about your loved one or things that are worrying you. They will continue to support your relative after the visit ends.

Acknowledgements

This leaflet was developed by members of the Care Homes Clinical and Professional Advisory Group, a multidisciplinary group which has been established to provide advice and guidance for care homes in Scotland during the pandemic. It was adapted from the Methodist Homes (MHA) COVID-19 visiting guidelines.