



18 December 2020

Dear Sir Robert, James, and Caroline,

Thank you for your letter dated 23 November 2020 and for your comments regarding the visiting guidance which was published at the time. I appreciate the concerns which you have raised with the previous guidance and hope that the below, regarding recent changes to the guidance, will satisfy your concerns.

On Tuesday 1 December, we published updated guidance to enable visits to take place for care home residents once national restrictions end. The guidance enables care home providers, families and local professionals to work together to find the right balance between the benefits of visiting on wellbeing and quality of life, and the risk of transmission of COVID-19 to vulnerable residents and social care staff.

The provisions made in the guidance enable visits to take place indoors, regardless of tiers, where a visitor has returned a negative COVID-19 test upon arrival. The roll-out of testing for visitors is in progress and will be available in all care homes before Christmas. For indoor, tested visits, visitors should minimise contact as much as possible to reduce the risk of infection transmission. Whilst physical contact may be allowed with a negative test, PPE and other IPC measures, residents, visitors and care homes should be aware that increased personal contact increases the risk of transmission.

The Balance of Risk and Respect for Human Rights:

I appreciate the concerns which you have raised surrounding the balance of risk and the respect for residents' human rights – it is one of the hardest factors of this issue we have had to carefully consider. Receiving visitors is an important part of care home life. Maintaining opportunities for visiting to take place is critical for supporting the health and wellbeing of residents and their relationships with friends and family.

The updated guidance continues to emphasise the need for individualised risk assessments for all residents to enable them to receive visiting in a way that is meaningful.

Facilitating Visits and Addressing 'Blanket Bans':

I note one of your key concerns surrounds the imposition of blanket 'no visiting' bans by certain care providers. We have addressed this in the recent guidance update.

In all cases, except where there is an active outbreak in the care home, the guidance makes clear that **allowing visiting in all tiers is the default position**. This means that,

unless there is an active outbreak of COVID-19, care homes in all tiers should seek to enable:

- Indoor visits where the visitor has been tested and returned a negative result;
- And outdoor visiting and 'screened' visits.

'End of Life' Circumstances:

Regarding concerns raised about the ambiguity of the term 'end of life' in previous iterations of the guidance, the updated guidance clarifies the meaning of the term 'End of Life'. 'End of Life Care' (for residents in care homes) means early identification of those who are in the last year of life and offering them the support to live as well as possible and then to die with dignity. NHS guidance is available to support this process, as well as advice from the British Geriatric Society. Links to both of these resources is provided for use in the updated guidance.

I hope the above has helped to address the concerns you have raised.

Finally, I'd like to take this opportunity to thank you for your ongoing contributions to our policy development, including as part of our visitor testing working group and hope that we will continue to work together to ensure the Department provides effective guidance for care providers, residents and their families. My private office will make sure you are invited to attend regular stakeholder engagement sessions.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Helen Whately', with a large, sweeping flourish underneath.

HELEN WHATELY