

Dear registered manager,

Advice on care home visiting in Wiltshire for the period of national lockdown

Following the introduction of national lockdown measures we are writing to provide updated local advice on care home visits in Wiltshire.

Links to the relevant guidance are below:

Visiting care homes during COVID-19 - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

National lockdown: Stay at Home - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Local infection rates

A key role of the local Director of Public Health is to give advice about infection rates within the local community. Wiltshire Public Health is monitoring infection rates and other sources of data daily and the latest figures for our area are published on the national Covid-19 dashboard.

Wiltshire currently has a lower rate of confirmed Covid-19 cases than other areas in the South West and in comparison to England, however they are still higher than they have been until now in the pandemic. **This means that the risk of acquiring a COVID-19 infection within our communities in Wiltshire is high.** There is also considerable pressure on our local health and social care system.

It is essential that all care homes in Wiltshire are aware of the increased risk of community infection, and that risk assessments and infection prevention and control policies and procedures are refreshed in line with information about local incidence.

National lockdown restrictions - stop close-contact indoor visits

National guidance is that visits to care homes can take place during the period of national restrictions, with arrangements such as substantial screens, visiting pods, or behind windows.

Welcoming family members into care homes from the community inevitably brings infection risk. But that is a risk that care homes can mitigate through stringent adherence to infection prevention and control measures. It is a risk that must be balanced against the importance of visiting and the benefits it brings to care home residents and their families.

Each home or provider is unique in terms of layout and the people supported. In line with current practice, home managers should continue to risk assess their visiting procedures taking into account their specific circumstances when deciding to allow for safe visiting to take place.

We do appreciate that currently there is a lot of pressure on care homes as you have increased staff absences, additional pressures of testing as well as managing safe visits. CQC has been clear in its guidance that high quality direct care must come first and that your risk assessment must take that into account. If your risk assessments confirm that the risk is too high for visiting to take place, then we will support that decision.

Following the introduction of lateral flow testing for care home visitors in December 2020 some care homes have introduced close-contact indoor visits where a visitor who has a negative test, is wearing appropriate PPE, and following other infection control measures is able to have physical contact with their loved one.

Guidance is that in national lockdown **close-contact indoor visits are not allowed, even when supported by lateral flow testing.**

No visits will be permitted in the event of an outbreak. Visits in exceptional circumstances such as end of life should always be supported and enabled.

Visiting care homes during COVID-19 - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk) provides further guidance how visits should be conducted. Residents cannot meet people indoors on a visit out (for example, to visit their relatives in the family home). There is separate guidance for those in supported living.

Care home managers should continue to regularly review national Visiting care homes during COVID-19 - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk) to keep up-to-date with advice about testing regimens for visitors.

Care home visiting during an outbreak

In the event of an outbreak in a care home, the home should immediately stop visiting. These restrictions should continue until the outbreak is confirmed as over.

All suspected outbreaks should be reported to the PHE South West Health Protection Team. Contact details for the South West Health Protection team:

0300 303 8162 Option 1 Option 1 swhpt@phe.gov.uk

Wiltshire Council will provide support to all care homes in an outbreak situation, in partnership with PHE and local health and care partners including the CCG Infection Prevention and Control Team.

Covid-19 vaccination for staff and residents

The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation: advice on priority groups for COVID-19 vaccination, 30 December 2020 - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk) have prioritised older adults residents in care homes and care home staff for Covid-19 vaccination and we ask you to ensure all staff and residents are vaccinated when it is offered. By the end of January all care homes should know when they are to receive their vaccines. The vaccine is an essential tool for protecting care home residents and staff. After having the vaccine most people will be protected against coronavirus, however some will remain vulnerable to infection and it is essential that care homes maintain robust infection prevention control measures. People are advised to have the vaccine even if they already have had COVID-19. Staff and residents can receive vaccines during the same visit to the home.

All care homes and social care staff should have completed their consent forms well before in case of any issues, Here's a link to the form: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-vaccination-consent-form-and-letter-for-social-care-staff>)

We will continue to review our overall advice about care home visiting as national and local tier restrictions are reviewed and further national guidance is released. If you require any further information at this stage, or for advice, please contact us on POSTcommissioning@wiltshire.gov.uk

Thank you for everything you are doing to care for your residents and staff.



Kate Blackburn

Director of Public Health, Wiltshire



Lucy Townsend

Wiltshire Council Interim Corporate Director, People