

Wessex Care Briefing 12.1 [08/02/22]

Update on Visiting Guidance from DHSC.

There are no changes to the requirements of all other visitors other than for family visitors of our residents.

We are expecting update guidance once the mandatory vaccination legislation has been repealed but must stress that until Parliament repeals this legislation than it still has the full force of law.

All visiting changes are subject to our internal risk assessment having due regard to the DHSC guidance and local Public Health information. At the last PH information point it was clear that Wiltshire is still at a significant community transfer infection rate and at that time 16 care homes across the county were closed due to outbreaks. Therefore, we consider the risk still high and substantial. However, evidence is now clear that the vaccination programme and our enhanced Infection Protection and Control measure are limiting and mitigating the spread and severity of the infection.

This gives us cause for optimism but we assess that by the end of February, early March we will have a clearer picture regarding the impact on care homes and their residents. Thus, we will be maintaining our cautionary approach to relaxation of visiting arrangements.

What does appear to be the case is care home outbreaks (defined as 2 or more confirmed infections in either staff or residents) is limited. Most homes are experiencing the odd infection most usually staff or new admission but not multiple infections within staff and or residents. Most staff are self-isolating because of COVID contact, usually as a result of a school age child. This is certainly our experience to date. We have one recent closure of Little Manor Care Centre related to 2 new residents but without any staff or other residents testing positive and no relationship between the residents who tested positive. All other closures have been related to staff infections which have not translated into in home infections. This is a significantly improved picture from previous infection spikes.

The key changes and information:

- visitors continue to be required to make arrangements with care homes in advance of the visit, to ensure safe visiting practices can be maintained taking into account the size and layout of the care home. Therefore, there will be no change to our current process for booking visits.
- duration of visits should not be limited if safe visiting practices can be maintained. We have reassessed this against our ability to maintain safe visiting and are please to advise an increase on visiting duration from 30 to 60 minutes. This will be reviewed again at the end of February with the hope of being able to remove this restriction completely.
- Essential Care Giver (ECG) access, role and responsibilities continue as normal.
- 3 consistent visitors are no longer required.
- To manage visiting numbers in our services a maximum of 3 visitors excluding the ECG and under 16-year-old allowed on each visit. Requests for single visits with larger numbers required Senior Management approval.

- visits should take place in a room most practical and comfortable for the resident (for example, residents with dementia may be more comfortable in their own room with familiar belongings). We will be maintaining our policy of only in bedroom or garden visits excluding communal areas. Again, we hope to review and change this arrangement, again returning to some visiting in communal areas in March/April.
- visitors should receive a negative lateral flow test result and report it on the day of their visit, either by conducting the test at home or when they arrive at the care home.
- subject to a risk assessment by the health protection team (HPT), outbreak restrictions may be lifted if 14 days have passed since the onset of symptoms in the most recent case, a round of PCR recovery testing of all residents and staff is undertaken, and there are no PCR positive results
- visitors who are not legally required to self-isolate are advised against visiting the care home (for 10 days) if they have been identified as a close contact of someone with COVID-19, unless absolutely necessary, even if they have been fully vaccinated. Where visits do occur, visitors should have received a negative lateral flow test result earlier in the day of their visit

All other previous visiting and testing requirements and procedures including IPC & PPE requirements remain in place as does the residents testing frequency and arrangements should there be an outbreak. From the 16th of February staff will no longer be required to do a weekly PCR test but will continue to do an LFD test before attending work. Testing requirements for staff and residents during an outbreak remain as before.

You will have read about the government's decision to repeal the mandatory vaccination legislation for all Health and Social Care staff following a public consultation exercise. In social care this has come too late to stop the loss of a significant number of dedicated and committed care workers many of which will not return thus exacerbating the recruitment and retention issues we face in social care. However as stated in previous briefings, at Wessex Care we spend a significant amount of time with our staff supporting them in their vaccination decision and as a result we lost, sadly none the less, only a handful of staff which we are already in contact with to support their hopeful return. We have an above 95% vaccinated staff and resident group across the company and in all Care Centres and Homes and with our advanced IPC measures we are confident that we can protect residents and support staff with regard to the vaccination issue much as we have done for years with regard to the flu vaccine. We will continue to expect new employees to be vaccinated and strongly encourage all staff to remain vaccinated for COVID and flu as part of our general 'duty of care' in line with our NHS colleagues

Finishing on a much more positive note we have now received our accreditation as a Real Living Wage employer and with our additional commitment to maintaining the differentials all our employees will see a significant rise in their hourly rates in recognition of their dedication and professionalism in their everyday roles and responsibilities but also with a clear acknowledgment of the outstanding commitment during the last two years and continuing pandemic.

As always please do not hesitate to make contact if you have any concerns or worries and of course positive feed back is really welcome and lifts the teams moral when they hear it so please if you can leave a comment on www.carehome.co.uk and or fill in our questionnaires which have just been issued.

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