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Health and Social Services Group



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

To:
Registered Providers and Responsible
Individuals of Care Home Services in Wales (adults and children)
Directors of Social Services
Chief Executives of Health Boards

5th June 2020

Dear Colleagues

Update on guidance for visits to care home services and reconnecting safely

Thank you for your continued commitment in caring for some of the most vulnerable people in Wales through this challenging period. I am writing to you today to update you on the steps we are taking to support you in planning how your services can safely accommodate visits from friends and family, as we begin to move out of lockdown.

My previous letter to you of 23 March on this matter set out the steps which were required to restrict visitors into care homes, namely that visits to a care home should only take place where absolutely essential. Given the potential impacts on both mental health and general well-being, the decision to restrict visitors was not taken lightly, and was informed by scientific advice in order to protect those living and working in care homes from the risk of infection. However, I fully appreciate how difficult this has been, both for the people living in your homes, their loved ones, and for your staff.

Following the recent changes to lockdown restrictions in Wales and the latest coronavirus regulations and guidance which came into effect on **Monday 1st June**, I am sure that you will have been considering how you can support people to reconnect safely with their family and friends. I am aware of some of the innovations already in place for facilitating face to face contact safely during the current lockdown for example, window visits and drive-through visits (where visitors stay within their cars). However, given the changes made on 1st June I am aware that visits in outdoor spaces such as gardens are also being considered.

To assist you in planning for outdoor visits to take place safely we have consulted Public Health Wales and advise you to consider the following measures:

- Ensure that visits only take place if homes are Covid-19 free;
- Ensure a risk-assessment is completed for all types of visit;
- Ensure visitors pre-arrange all visits with the care home;

- Seek confirmation that visitors are not symptomatic;
- People who are required to self-isolate, including as an identified contact of a positive case under Test, Trace and Protect Strategy must stay at home (and are not permitted to visit a care home);
- Ensure visitors observe hand hygiene requirements and provide hand sanitiser at a fixed point;
- Take all reasonable measures to ensure all visitors maintain a 2 metre distance from residents, staff and other visitors at all times;
- Discourage visits from young children and toddlers due to the difficulty of maintaining social distancing and the risk that presents;
- Specify a maximum visiting time – we suggest 30 minutes as a guide;
- Limit the number of visitors to no more than two people from the same household;
- Minimise the number of households from which visitors are drawn. As a guide, it is suggested that visits be limited to visitors from 1 or 2 households per week (if multiple visits from the same household occur within a week, it should be the same two visitors, not different people from the same household). However, this should take into account the residents' individual circumstances - residents may have multiple adult children each living in separate households;
- Inform all visitors they will be required to wear a face covering, and specify whether they should bring their own or whether you will provide. If you are providing face coverings this should be restricted to single use type I or type II masks and should not compromise the supply of Personal Protective Equipment for the care home staff;
- Ensure that those making outdoor visits do not enter the care home premises;
- If a toilet visit is necessary consider having a designated "visitor toilet" which would need to be cleaned after each use and is not used by others (staff or care home residents) until it has been cleaned once all visitors have left;
- Ensure that food and drink are not shared;
- Inform all visitors that gifts and flowers are discouraged. If food is brought by visitors as a gift, restrict this to sealed, wipeable products which do not require refrigeration;
- Ensure all chairs and equipment are cleaned between visits.

I would encourage you to make every effort to facilitate outdoor visits where it is safe to do so, given the significant well-being benefits to residents of being with loved ones in person, albeit in a socially distanced manner. However, it is important to consider all of the above steps, to minimise the risk of infection for your care home.

In my letter of 23 March I recognised in particular that sensitive discussions are needed where residents are receiving end of life care. I also stated that any request for a visit for a specific purpose felt to be absolutely essential must be made to the care home manager for a decision. This continues to apply and I would encourage you to make every effort to facilitate visits from loved ones in these circumstances, where appropriate.

I want to let you know that we are taking advice from Public Health Wales and are working with Care Inspectorate Wales and representatives from the sector to produce some more detailed guidance setting out key considerations to support you in your decision making. Although I want this guidance to be prepared at pace, I also want to ensure providers and members of the public have an opportunity to submit their thoughts and ideas. If you wish to contribute the inspectorate is seeking people's views via an online form, attached below:

<https://careinspectorate.wales/200529-we-welcome-your-ideas-how-care-homes-can-safely->

[enable-families-visit](#). Please share this information with your residents and their representatives.

In terms of timescale we intend to issue an initial version of the guidance in the coming weeks. It will be available via: <https://gov.wales/health-professionals-coronavirus>. As with other guidance prepared for the current pandemic, this advice will be subject to regular review, to ensure it remains consistent with wider regulations and guidance. The next review of the lockdown regulations in Wales is scheduled for Thursday 18 June and the guidance will be reviewed, and if necessary amended, to reflect any changes.

I am also mindful that there may be further easing of lockdown restrictions over the coming weeks and months which may enable indoor visits to take place. Further guidance will be prepared in readiness for that eventuality to ensure that such visits can take place safely.

I have been made aware of some excellent examples in terms of supporting people's well-being and contact with their family and friends during these last few months. I know that the people you care for and their families and friends have valued regular updates and contact through newsletters, photographs, cards, phone calls, e mails as well as video calls. Activities within the home environment are more valuable than ever when visits are not possible. I thank you for what you have done over these last months and encourage you to keep supporting people in this way.

Thank you again for your continued commitment.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'A. Heaney', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

ALBERT HEANEY
Deputy Director General