

12 August 2020

Dear Colleague

Re: BIRMINGHAM COVID-19 VISITING FOR CARE HOMES

We recognise that since the start of the Covid-19 global pandemic, many care homes have taken steps to reduce the risk of outbreaks and to protect some of our most vulnerable citizens. For many, this has included reducing non-essential visits and in some cases, stopping new admissions into the home.

On 22 July 2020 (updated on 31 July 2020), the Government published new guidance about how visiting in care homes should be coordinated as we ease lockdown measures. This can be accessed using the link below:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/visiting-care-homes-during-coronavirus/update-on-policies-for-visiting-arrangements-in-care-homes>

This guidance confirms the priority is to continue to reduce the risk of Covid-19 transmission in care homes and prevent future outbreaks - ensuring the health and safety of both care workers and residents. However, it also recognises the challenges that lockdown has posed for many residents and families and that visits are important for all those in care settings.

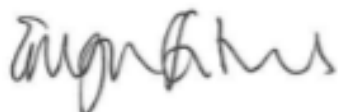
As Director of Public Health, I am writing to you to confirm the Council's care home visiting criteria and how the risk levels will be assessed and monitored for all care homes in Birmingham, which are set out in **Appendix 1**. I know you will be keen to protect residents within the homes you manage, however I do need to emphasise the importance of only allowing non-essential visitors in line with the national guidance and the attached Birmingham criteria.

I also have the unfortunate job of sharing that whilst I recognise the hard work of everyone in reducing the number of Covid-19 outbreaks across the City, the current rate of infection is now above the set threshold of 14 cases/100,000 population. This unfortunately means that **any and all non-essential visits to care homes must now cease with immediate effect**.

You will of course receive notifications from the Council, via your Commissioning contacts as and when the situation changes, but your cooperation on this matter and the immediate ceasing of all non-essential visits would be appreciated.

Yours sincerely

PP



Dr. Justin Varney
Director of Public Health

APPENDIX 1

Birmingham Care Home Visiting Criteria

Background

The process of considering non-essential visitors to care homes is being led by the Director of Public Health for each Local Authority and the following visiting criteria set out how the risk levels will be assessed and monitored for all care homes in Birmingham.

Across Birmingham there are almost 300 registered Residential and Nursing Care Homes and so the risk assessment is based on the data picture for the City and the weekly changes in Covid-19 infection rates with specific requirements for care homes to meet before they can open to non-essential visitors in line with the national guidelines.

The Council are keen to support care homes to support safe visiting for residents and welcome approaches which see family or close friend carers as equal partners in promoting the well-being of the resident.

Criteria

In order for Birmingham care homes to open to non-essential visitors, the following thresholds must be met:

At a Birmingham level:

- Rate of infections in the city are below 14 cases per 100,000
AND
- No significant increase in case numbers or Covid-19 outbreak situations
AND
- Positive test rate remains below 5%
AND
- Testing rate for the City remains above 400 tests/100,000 population
AND
- No more than 12 new confirmed situations with confirmed cases in care homes per week in the previous 4 weeks.

These thresholds will be determined on a weekly basis by Birmingham City Council, if there is a significant change upon review then care homes will be alerted by email from the Council. The care home should not open to non-essential visits unless it is confirmed as safe to do so from the Council's communication of the weekly thresholds.

Before opening to non-essential visitors, at an individual care home level, it is the responsibility of the care home to ensure that there is;

- A full 29 days* with no new cases suspected or confirmed in staff or residents;
- Full participation in the national and local testing regimes for staff and residents;

- Full compliance with national guidance on PPE (including use of face masks) unless risk assessments have been completed in accordance with national guidance and shared with staff;
- Full compliance with national and local requirements in relation to Infection Prevention and Control;
- A published Covid Visiting Policy which is informed by risk assessments, in accordance with national guidance;
- Individual risk assessments in line with national guidance in place for all residents and identification of those most vulnerable;
- Staff risk assessments completed in line with national guidance; and
- Clear guidelines for visitors on keeping Covid-safe while visiting.

* a recovered outbreak is defined as 28 days or more since the last suspected or confirmed case reported in either staff or residents.

Once the weekly thresholds have been determined and it is confirmed care homes are able to open to non-essential visitors, the decision to open then rests with the care home. They should not do so if they feel that they cannot do so safely for residents, families and staff.

The care home should not reopen to visits unless they think they are ready to do so.

Guidance

The latest national guidance on visiting for care homes can be found here, which includes details about the risk assessments required:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/visiting-care-homes-during-coronavirus/update-on-policies-for-visiting-arrangements-in-care-homes>

Further information relating to staff risk assessments, can also be found here:

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/coronavirus/working-safely/index.htm>

Guidance on how to work safely in the care homes, including latest PPE guidance can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-how-to-work-safely-in-care-homes>