

# Care home residents to be allowed one visitor as part of cautious easing of Lockdown

- Visitors to be allowed to hold hands, with tests required before entry and PPE to be worn on site
- Scheme designed to be the next, cautious step in bringing families back together

Care home residents will be able to be visited indoors by a single, named individual from 8 March as part of the Prime Minister's roadmap to ease lockdown restrictions.

The scheme will allow a single visitor to hold hands indoors with their relative or contact in a care home, and make repeat visits under carefully designed conditions to keep residents, staff and visitors safe.

Every resident will have the opportunity to name one individual, who will be required to have a test beforehand, wear PPE during the visit and avoid close contact.

Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock said:

I know how important visiting a loved one is and I'm pleased we will soon be in a position for people to be carefully and safely reunited with loved ones who live in care homes.

This is just the first step to getting back to where we want to be. We need to make sure we keep the infection rate down, to allow greater visiting in a step-by-step way in the future.

Restrictions on visits have been in place during national lockdown to protect vulnerable residents. While coronavirus cases remain high, the number of infections is falling. The UK's vaccination programme has seen every care home resident offered a jab, with almost 17 million vaccinations carried out in total.

Outdoor, pod and screen visits will be able to continue in line with the published guidance which has been in place during lockdown, meaning there will be chances for residents to see more than just the one person they nominate.

The clinically led approach has been designed in partnership with the Deputy Chief Medical Officers and Public Health England and is the next step towards regular indoor visits resuming.

Minister for Care Helen Whately said:

One of the hardest things during this pandemic has been seeing families desperate to be reunited with their loved ones kept apart and I absolutely want to bring them back together.

Throughout this pandemic we have sought clinical guidance on how visits can be conducted safely.

We had to restrict the majority of visiting when the new variant was discovered but we have done all we can to enable visits to continue in some form. That includes providing funding towards costs of screens and PPE.

As we begin to open up we will move step by step to increase visits while remembering we are still in the grip of a global pandemic.

All visitors will receive a lateral flow test and be required to follow all infection prevention and control measures.

These measures, based on the science, represent a balance between the risk of infections and the importance of visiting for the physical and mental wellbeing of residents and their families.

Professor Deborah Sturdy, chief nurse for adult social care, said:

I know how much people want to visit, hug and kiss their loved ones but doing so can put lives at risk so we would ask people to continue to follow the rules.

This is a first step towards resuming indoor visits and we all hope to be able to take further steps in the future.

I am pleased that, as a result of so many people following the rules, we are in a position to increase visits and I hope this is just the start.

Close-contact care will be restricted to visitors who provide assistance – such as help dressing, eating or washing – which is essential to the immediate health and wellbeing of a resident. Existing guidance already enables these visits under exceptional circumstances.

We are providing extra support for these carers by providing them with the same regular PCR testing regime and PPE arrangements as care home workers to further reduce the risk of infection to themselves and those for whom they provide vital care.

All care home providers not experiencing an outbreak will be asked to follow the updated guidance and continue to work together with families and local professionals to ensure visits are possible while continuing to limit the risk of transmission of COVID-19.

The government will continue to provide free tests and PPE to support the scheme and has already distributed £1.1 billion from the infection control fund, an additional £149 million to support rapid testing and visits and £120 million to increase staffing.

- The person nominated will remain unchanged while this step is in place
- There will be discretion for care homes to allow more than one named visitor in exceptional circumstances
- Home testing of single, named visitors will not be allowed during the start of the scheme but will be reviewed
- Hand-holding is allowed but named visitors will be asked to avoid any closer contact
- Vaccination is not mandatory and will not be a condition of visiting
- In terms of visiting out, the rules and guidance will remain unchanged at this stage
- Visiting will be suspended during local outbreaks in individual homes
- Further guidance will be published before the launch of the single, named visitor scheme on 8 March