

Guidance on visits by family members and friends to Registered Care Homes and shared supported living settings in England

Key points for indoor visits

The key points below are followed by more comprehensive guidance for visits both indoors and outdoors.

- People who live in Registered Care Homes are, from Monday, allowed up to two designated regular visitors indoors.
- We are also allowing two designated visitors indoors for the people we support in shared supported living *if* they cannot meet outdoors and *if* not having visitors indoors would cause them distress.
- In both cases, visitors will need to have returned a negative lateral flow test result. The government is making these available to Registered Care Homes. For visitors to supported living services, the manager will agree whether we will provide the visitors with test kits or if they will make use of the test kits now being provided free to everyone. Visitors must take the test on the day of the visit and show their result.
- Only the two nominated individuals will be able to undertake visits inside the service. These individuals must be the same people for the duration of the current restrictions.
- We also ask that, where possible, visitors self-isolate for at least two days before visiting so that the result of the rapid lateral flow test they will take on arrival is more reliable.
- [This risk assessment template](#) needs to be completed before any indoor visit can go ahead.
- All normal infection control measures need to be maintained, including temperature checks and the wearing of full PPE by indoor visitors.
- Visitors may hold hands, but should bear in mind that any contact increases the risk of transmission.
- All visits must be planned in advance with the locality manager.

Scope and context

In line with the latest stage of the government's roadmap out of lockdown for England, which takes effect from 12th April 2021, we are updating our guidance in relation to visits to people living in care homes to increase the number of designated regular visitors indoors from one to two. This guidance also covers visits to people living in shared supported living settings where it is not possible to meet outside, where likewise we are allowing two designated family members or friends to visit indoors where they have a negative Lateral Flow Device (LFD) test result.

Dimensions has decided to apply the same principles as those currently used in care homes, to all of our shared supported living services where a meeting with family or friends is not possible outside of the home in line with the national guidelines, and were it would cause distress to the individual we support not to have family or friends visiting indoors.

The guidance has been prepared using the principles from our [framework for making decisions about in-person contact](#) during the pandemic and is intended to complement it.

If and when the rules in England change, we will update our guidance accordingly.

LFD testing to facilitate visits

This guidance starts from the clear position that we want to facilitate meetings between the people we support and their family members and friends after what has been a very difficult year.

Visits by family and friends is a central part of life and is important for maintaining health, wellbeing and quality of life for the people we support. Visiting is also vital for family and friends to maintain contact and life-long relationships with their loved ones and contribute to their support and care.

LFD testing is now available to everyone in England via a number of routes in local communities. To support meaningful visiting in **care homes**, the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) is making LFD tests available to order via the Department of Health and Social Care's portal.

For **supported living settings**, some services are able to order and supply tests to visitors from the DHSC, but additionally Dimensions has a stock of tests that can also be ordered if these routes or local tests are not available to visitors. However, given the freely accessible supply of tests within the community, the manager of the supported living service

will advise visitors on the route they will need to follow to access tests and provide a negative result prior to the visit. More details on testing routes is covered below. If there are any issues in visitors accessing tests, Dimensions will provide these in order to facilitate visits as we know how important these visits are.

While testing visitors can reduce the risk associated with visiting, it does not completely remove the risk of infection. However, when used alongside robust Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) measures such as Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), it can support homes to safely maintain a balance between infection control and the vital benefits of visiting to the health and wellbeing of everyone they live with.

Our stance on vaccination

The government's care home guidance states that: "It is not a condition of visiting that the visitor or the resident should have been vaccinated. However, it is strongly recommended that all visitors and residents take up the opportunity to be vaccinated when they are invited to do so through the national programme." We endorse this guidance for all settings and, likewise, will be supporting people and encouraging everyone to take up the vaccine as they are able to.

Guiding principles

Our priority is to manage and minimise the risks of visits, but we recognise that we cannot eliminate all risks. Therefore, capacity and informed consent are key factors.

We are committed to applying the following four principles to the decisions we make about in-person contact during this pandemic:

- **Lawful** – we will follow the law and relevant regulatory frameworks.
- **Proportionate** – we will balance people's rights and risks relating to in-person contact.
- **Responsive** – we will involve people in decisions and keep our decisions under review.
- **Transparent** – we will record and explain our decisions in an accessible way.

Visiting people we support

- The current government guidance for shared supported living states that people should follow the national guidance and restrictions applicable to any member of the public where this is possible. With effect from 29th March 2021, up to two households or six people can meet outside. This is the option that should be followed wherever practical, but indoor visits are possible, if they are in the best interests of the people who live there, and they are undertaken in a risk managed way. In order to facilitate this Dimensions will be using the same approach to indoor visits that is in place for care home settings. If the person we support is already in a support bubble this will continue – but LFD testing may need to be introduced to support bubble arrangements, if it is not already in use, where others in the home are now receiving visitors via the LFD route below.
- The supported living setting will risk assess the overall level of risk to everyone who is living in the home. This will determine whether the service is a high risk setting based on the criteria set out in the Director of Public Health guidance.
- Additionally an individual risk assessment will be completed for the person who is being visited and their designated visitors. The inclusion of the visitors in this risk assessment will help to control risks – for example, a mum in her 70s who drives to the home to visit their daughter, will be a lower risk visitor than a brother who works in retail and uses public transport. This risk assessment will determine the control measures required to facilitate safe visits for everyone.
- In all settings each person we support will be able to nominate two designated individuals to undertake visits to their home. *We appreciate that this will be a difficult choice for some people who have large extended families and circles of support and we ask that you help families understand the limitations that we are operating within.*
- Only the two nominated individuals will be able to undertake visits inside the house.
- These individuals must be the same people for the duration of the restrictions that are being set by the government for care homes and the guidance on visits to supported living settings.
- The individuals may be changed if, for example, the visiting family member becomes unable to visit for a period of time e.g. due to ill health or work commitments, but changes must be agreed 14 days in advance with the manager, and must be supported by a best interest's decision for the individual they are visiting. The new visitor may be asked to undertake additional steps to reduce risk based on the needs of everyone living in the home, for example self-isolation and additional testing.

- We also ask that were possible visitors and family members self-isolate for at least two days before visiting (so that the result of the rapid lateral flow coronavirus test they will take on arrival is more reliable) and that they make sure that all of the following apply before visiting:
 - They do not have any COVID-19 symptoms
 - They have not tested positive for COVID-19 in the last 14 days
 - They are not currently self-isolating
 - They do not share a household with anyone who has been told to self-isolate (close contact of a COVID-19 case) in the previous 10 days, or anyone who has returned from high risk countries in the same time period.
 - They have not been in contact with someone with COVID-19 symptoms in last 10 days
 - They have not been contacted by or advised by any Test and Trace system to self-isolate in the last 10 days
 - They have not travelled or returned from a trip outside of the UK in the last 14 days
- If someone having contact with family members might put another person they live with at risk, we will need to work with all parties to find a safe solution and may ask external services, e.g. social services care management, to assist us with the risk management.
- **Visitors to care homes** will be given a rapid lateral flow coronavirus test (LFD) when they arrive and they must use it outside or in a designated area. Some people will be exempt because they have had a positive test result for coronavirus in the previous 90 days. In this case the manager should be provided with evidence of this before the visit. Each care home will have a planned way of testing based on the space available. Visitors will only be admitted if the test result is negative. If families/friends will be travelling a long way to visit their relative, the manager will work with them to facilitate testing before they travel where this is possible. This may involve sending test kits to the family to take before they leave, or for visitors to access community testing kits and provide proof of a negative result taken in the last 24 hours.
- **Visitors to supported living settings** will be advised by the manager on how they should access LFD tests. In some cases the service may be able to provide these, but visitors may be asked to access these themselves prior to visiting and provide proof of a negative test result taken in the last 24 hours (unless they are exempt as having had a positive test result for coronavirus in the previous 90 days).

- All visitors will have their temperature checked before entering the person's home. If their temperature is 37.8 degrees Celsius or above, they cannot enter, regardless of the test result.
- All visitors will be required to wear full PPE, which they will be required to put on before entering the building, and to remove and follow appropriate disposal protocols upon leaving.
- The visitor will be required to follow direction to go directly to and from the visiting area – they will not be permitted to move freely around the home, or to interact with other people who live there.
- The visitor will be required to follow social distancing, hand hygiene protocols and any other reasonable instruction in relation to Infection Control.
- Visitors and people we support are advised to keep physical contact to a minimum during visits. People are able to hold hands if they wish, but should bear in mind that any contact increases the risk of transmission. There should not be close physical contact such as hugging. Managers should clearly explain to visitors what they can and cannot do and what levels of PPE and hand washing/sanitising will be needed during the visit to reduce the risks from this possible contact.
- We understand that more than two family members may travel to the visit. In these instances, two people will be allowed into the home following a negative LFD test result, and others could have an outside visit at the same time. This arrangement must be discussed and planned with the service before visiting to enable timings and support to be arranged.
- We can also offer outdoors visits to other friends or family members with arrangements such as outdoor visiting using gazebos, etc., or behind windows where the home have been able to do accommodate this, in line with national guidance on outside visits.
- For services where multiple people live, visits will need to be limited to set time frames, and need to be planned in advance and booked with the manager/service so that only two people are visiting at a time.
- Service will need to follow a strict cleaning process after visits.

Guidance for supporting outdoor visits in all settings

Visits should happen in the open air wherever possible. This might include under a cover such as an awning, gazebo. For these visits:

- The visitor(s) and person must remain at least two metres apart at all times and social distancing (between visitors and people we support, colleagues, and visitors from other households) must be maintained at all times – during the visit, and around the building and any grounds.
- If social distancing cannot be maintained, full PPE will need to be worn by the visitor(s).

If family members have any queries about this guidance, they can call the helpline for families (open from 9.30am to 1.30pm, Monday to Friday) on 0300 303 9161 or email the team at family.helpline@dimensions-uk.org.

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