

16th July 2021

Dear family member,

I am pleased to have another opportunity to write to you as we move to the next stage of this pandemic. From Monday, almost all legal constraints on social contact in England will be removed and replaced by guidance. It will also no longer be a legal requirement to wear face coverings in shops, on public transport (other than in London) and in other inside venues. While this big step towards normality will be welcomed by many, some of you may be concerned about what it will mean for your loved one. I would like to reassure you that the safety and wellbeing of all those we support will continue to be our number one priority.

I personally find it unsettling that legal restrictions are being removed at a time when coronavirus cases are rising fast. And while the success of the vaccine roll-out means that the link between infection and death has been reduced, it hasn't been broken altogether. The numbers of people in hospital with Covid-19 and the number of people dying with Covid-19 are on the rise. This is no time to take our eyes off the ball, and we most certainly won't be doing that. We will continue to follow government guidance to the letter – and I am sure that rules on wearing PPE in social care settings will remain in place for some time – and we will continue to stick to all our other infection control measures.

Since I last wrote to you, the government confirmed its intention to make it mandatory for all workers in Registered Care Homes (not just where older people live) in England to be vaccinated against Covid-19, and this legislation was passed by the House of Commons this week by 319 votes to 246. This will mean that both staff working in Registered Care Homes and professionals and tradespeople visiting them will have to be doubly vaccinated. There are some exceptions and these include family and friends who are visiting loved ones and staff who cannot be vaccinated for clinical reasons. The government is now consulting on whether this rule should be extended to all social care and NHS staff.

The legislation does not take effect until October, and so while we are requiring all new paid staff or volunteers to be willing to receive the vaccine, existing members of staff don't yet have to get vaccinated – although we are continuing to make the case very strongly that they should. We are also continuing to insist that colleagues wear full PPE at all times when supporting someone, whether they are vaccinated or not, so that everyone is kept as safe as possible.

And talking of keeping people safe, it is thanks to the professionalism and care of our brilliant support teams up and down the country that we continue to be having great success in keeping people safe. I am pleased to share with you that not a single person we support nor any colleague has died over the last 12 months having tested positive for Covid-19 in the previous 28 days across the Dimensions Group. Of course every life lost to this virus is a tragedy, and 28 people we support and one colleague have died with Covid-19 since the start of the pandemic. We share in the grief of these people's loved ones, and I have been clear all along that we would commemorate the people we support who sadly passed away. After considering various options, we have decided to plant and dedicate a tree to each person. We

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have therefore been in touch with The Heart of England Trust to make arrangements for a two year-old sapling to be specially planted in memory of each person who has died with Covid-19. Each tree will have a dedication plaque in the ground.

Some of the hardest times during this pandemic have been when we were unable to visit our loved ones. Thankfully visits to the people we support, as well as visits by the people we support to family homes, can now be facilitated as restrictions on gatherings are being lifted. However, the pandemic is still with us and so we are keeping our infection control measures in place – including the need for all visitors to return a negative lateral flow coronavirus test before entering and to wear a face covering while visiting people in residential care settings – but the ability to see and hug loved ones again is wonderful. Our current rules are summarised in an attachment to this letter, and will remain under regular review.

If you have any questions about our current visiting policies, please speak to your loved one's locality manager. For general enquiries, remember that you can always contact our family helpline (open from 9.30am to 1.30pm, Monday to Friday) on 0300 303 9161 or by email at family.helpline@dimensions-uk.org. At this point I'd also like to remind you about our Zoom sessions for families, which are held from 10am to 11am and from 7.30pm to 8.30pm on the second Thursday of every month for a friendly chat. Simply contact the helpline to book a place and get the link.

Finally, I'd like to remind you that at Discovery and elsewhere in the Dimensions Group we have ways of acknowledging both colleagues and people we support who have 'gone the extra mile'. For colleagues we have our Inspiring People scheme, and as a family member you can nominate any colleague or volunteer for the extra special work they do. All those who are nominated receive a certificate, and at the end of every month all nominees are entered into a prize draw. To nominate someone, simply email your nomination to inspiringpeople@dimensions-uk.org or phone 0300 303 9027, stating the person's name, your name and the reason you are nominating them.

And for people we support we have our ROC Stars programme, and you can nominate people for this on our website. Anyone we support who is contributing to their community or helping people can be nominated by anyone who knows them. Everyone who is nominated gets a certificate and a celebration award. Then our ROC Stars Panel, made up of colleagues and people we support, gets together once every three months to choose a quarterly Change Maker and this person will go forward to be considered for our annual Ultimate ROC Star award.

To close, I would like to say thank you once again to you for your support, understanding, patience and forbearance during these last 16 difficult months. The pandemic is still with us and the wretched virus that has caused so much heartache and havoc hasn't gone away, which I know is frustrating. However, you have my word that at the Dimensions Group we are not taking our eye off the ball and things are getting better, thanks to the vaccine. Although the journey to get there will be winding, we're definitely going in the right direction.

Yours sincerely,



Steve Scown
Chief Executive
Dimensions Group (including Discovery)

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Key points from the letter

- All restrictions on meeting people are being lifted in England.
- The wearing of face coverings is also becoming voluntary, but they are still required when visiting our services.
- Our support colleagues are continuing to wear PPE at all times when supporting your loved one.
- Vaccination will become mandatory for many social care workers from October.
- No-one we support has died with Covid-19 in the last year.
- Sadly, 28 people we support and one colleague across the Dimensions Group have died with Covid-19 earlier in the pandemic, and we are planting a tree to commemorate each of them.
- Restrictions on visiting have been removed, but a negative coronavirus test and face coverings inside are still required.
- For more information, you can contact our helpline for families on 0300 303 9161 or by email at family.helpline@dimensions-uk.org.
- You can also book a place on our monthly Zoom meetings for families via the helpline number 0300 303 9161, or email address family.helpline@dimensions-uk.org
- You can thank Discovery colleagues for providing great support by nominating them for an Inspiring People Awards, and people we support can be nominated for a ROC Stars award.
- Thank you for your understanding. We are on our way out of this pandemic.

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Summary of visiting rules from 19th July

We will review our rules every fortnight, but here is a summary of our current positions on visits for family members:

1. Your relative lives in registered residential care:

Visiting your relative at their home – negative test before visiting; face mask to be worn at all times while inside; social distancing encouraged.

Your relative going to stay at your home – no need for face coverings or social distancing while in the family home but a negative lateral flow test result required before returning if the stay was overnight (and self-isolation required if a test isn't possible)

Having a day trip together – Family required to return negative lateral flow tests beforehand; no face coverings or social distancing required, but face coverings are recommended on public transport and inside.

2. Your relative lives in Supported Living and shares their home with other people we support:

Visiting your relative at their home – negative test before visiting; face mask to be worn at all times while inside, social distancing encouraged.

Your relative going to stay at your home – negative test before returning if the stay was overnight; no other requirements.

Having a day trip together – no requirements but face masks encouraged on public transport and while inside.

3. Your relative lives alone (with support for some or all of the time)

Visiting your relative at their home – no requirements, although there should be a risk assessed approach and a face mask is recommended.

Your relative going to stay at your home – no requirements.

Having a day trip together – no requirements, although we recommend face coverings on public transport and inside buildings.

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