

Purpose and Scope

The Home of Comfort recognises the importance of visits to residents, their friends and families, and to the Home. However the outbreak of Covid-19 has had a disproportionate impact on residential care settings around the world, and for two periods, during the peaks of the first and second waves of infection, visits only took place at the Home in emergency situations.

This policy sets out the Home's current policy and practice for managing visiting, and is based on guidance issued by the Department of Health and Social care and from our local CCG Care Home Support Team.

This policy applies to all residents.

Aims

This policy seeks to balance the rights of each individual resident and their friends and family members with the rights of the others within the care setting (residents and staff) and the duties and responsibilities of the Home.

There is evidence that the periods of zero visiting in place at most care settings, including Home of Comfort, during the UK 'Lockdown', has been emotionally challenging for residents and for their friends and family members.

It is also clear that people living and working in residential settings have been more vulnerable than the general population to both contract Covid19, and to suffer more serious effects from the infection. Early data indicates that although vaccination is effective at protecting from Covid19, older people are more likely to be in the small minority of people for whom vaccines are lower in efficacy.

The policy has been written using a dynamic risk based approach and taking into account the welfare and safety of all residents and staff, and what the Home is practically able to manage.

Professional Visitors

During the pandemic, many of the teams involved in caring for residents have been able to start using video-calling technology to support residents, and whenever possible the Home will facilitate video appointments for assessments by professionals including GPs, community teams, specialist care home teams and social workers.

We recognise face to face appointments work better in some circumstances and when the Matron or Nurse in Charge believe this is in the best interests of the resident these will be facilitated. They will take place in a large space to allow for social distancing where there is plenty of ventilation.

Unless in an emergency, any professional visitor coming into the Home must do so by prior appointment and will be required to demonstrate their compliance with the current guidance on testing for professionals visiting a care home:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-lateral-flow-testing-in-adult-social-care-settings/testing-for-professionals-visiting-care-homes>

This may be by providing evidence of a negative Covid test taken within the preceding 72 hours, or by taking a test on arrival at the Home.

New Residents

At the present time, all new residents admitted to a residential care setting are required to isolate for 14 days from the day of admission. This is in case they have been exposed to the coronavirus on the day prior to their admission, in which case they may in theory contract Covid19 at any time during the following 14 days. Unfortunately, testing cannot be used to shorten this period.

The Home recognises that this period of isolation is difficult for residents, particularly at a time when everything is new and they are getting to know our staff. We will do everything that we can to help new residents maintain contact with people who are important to them during this time, and to facilitate face to face visits as soon as possible once the isolation period has finished.

The Home will review the 14 day isolation period as soon as rules from the government allow us to do so.

Statement of Policy Relating to Routine Visits

Whilst there remains Covid19 infection circulating in the general population of the UK, and specifically in the Portsmouth and Hampshire region, the Home expects restrictions on face to face visits to remain a requirement of government guidance in England for care homes.

The Home will do everything possible to facilitate as many visits for each resident as possible, but is required to manage the risks of visiting both for each resident and for the Home overall.

- All visitors are asked to read and comply with the Home's Visitor Code of Contact, given below.
- Residents will be encouraged and supported to maintain contact with as many friends and family members as possible by letter and telephone. This will include
 - a. Provision of a specific telephone number for residents, and support from staff to receive calls
 - b. Support from staff to read and display cards and letters, and to send responses.
 - c. Support to use electronic devices, including the use of planned video calls using equipment provided by the Home and platforms including Whatsapp, Zoom and Skype.
- The Home recognises that restrictions on the number of people who can visit a resident are difficult for some residents and for their friends and families. Unfortunately while this is in the national guidance, our flexibility is very limited to deviate from this. It is not possible to change nominated visitors apart from in exceptional circumstances.
- Visits may only take place by pre-booked appointment to be made with the Nurse in Charge. Appointment times will include the start and finish time of the visit, which will be limited in length. This is so that the total number of visitors in the building at any time can be kept within the number that has been assessed as safe.
- Each visit booking must include the name of the person or persons who will be coming to visit. Substitutions will result in the visit being cancelled.
- Children are welcome to attend distanced visits. If a resident wishes to nominate a child as one of their nominated visitors, they are asked to discuss this with the Matron or with her Deputy.

- Pets may be brought to an outside visit but should not come into the Home or have direct contact with a resident.
- A resident has the right to refuse to see any visitor, and this right will be upheld by the Nurse in Charge, who will if necessary explain the situation to the visitor.
- The Home understands that visitors may become upset, particularly if their friend or relative is not well, and all staff will do their best to provide support and comfort to visitors as well as to our residents.
However, **any visitor who is violent, abusive, disruptive, or who fails to comply with the Home's policies or with instructions from the Nurse in Charge, will be asked to leave.** In exceptional circumstances, the Home's Matron may decide that an individual may no longer be permitted to make appointments for visits.
- The Home welcomes ideas, suggestions and comments from visitors that might help us to improve the care that we offer. We recognise that while visiting is so restricted it is difficult for friends and relatives to provide their input, and encourage anyone with concerns or comments to contact Matron by email or telephone in the first instance.

Visitor Code

All visitors are asked to comply with the following:

- Make an appointment for a specific day and time, confirming who will be attending.
- Not to bring anybody else with them.
- Travel on foot, by bicycle, or by car if possible, using public transport only as a last resort.
- If the resident they are coming to see has been unwell, to contact the Home on the morning of the visit to check that the situation has not changed and to ensure the person they are coming to see is well enough for the visit to go ahead.
- Not to come to the Home if they have any symptoms which may be due to Covid-19.
- To sign in to the Home's Visitors Book and sign out at the start and end of their visit.
- When they arrive at the Home, to comply with the Home's policies on screening (which may include testing) and complete the necessary declarations.
- Comply with infection control measures including the use of PPE and distancing as requested by the Home, **throughout the visit.**
Some residents will find it more difficult to hear a relative who is wearing a face covering. Visitors can help by
 - a. Maintaining eye contact with the resident
 - b. Not wearing a hat or anything else which might further conceal their face
 - c. Wearing their hair and dressing in a way that may help the resident to recognise them
- Ensure that any items they bring with them for the resident are 'low risk' and are packed into a plastic bag. Items may be kept in the bag for a period before they are unpacked to reduce the risk of infection.
Visitors are encouraged to discuss any items they are unsure about with the Home's nursing staff in advance.
- Be understanding if the visit has to be cancelled due to bad weather or because the resident is not well enough to come out of her or his room.

- Not to move around the Home unless they are accompanied by a member of staff. If a visit takes place in a resident's room, the visitor will need to use the call bell system to ask for a member of staff to come when the visit ends.
- Cooperate at all times with the Home's staff in relation to visits.
- To receive, unless there are medical reasons not to do so, a Covid19 vaccination, when they are offered one by the NHS vaccination service.

Close Contact Visits

In line with current guidance, residents at the Home are permitted close contact visits from up to five individuals. These individuals are known as their 'nominated visitors'.

Up to two of the nominated visitors may visit the Home during any one day, either together, or (if the Home is able to accommodate this) separately.

Nominated visitors may visit the resident in her or his room, and have physical contact, for example holding hands. The official guidance states that 'hugging is to be discouraged'. The Home asks all nominated visitors to be mindful of the possible risks to residents of any close contact during a visit and to avoid excessive or prolonged physical contact.

Nominated visitors must:

- Make an appointment with the Home and attend on time
- Undertake a Covid19 test at the start of the visit, or on the same day prior to the visit
- Complete a declaration prior to the visit
- Wear appropriate PPE at all times during the visit
- Follow the guidance on distancing at all times while in the Home, and comply with the Home's policies. All visitors must read and comply with the Home's Visitor Code of Conduct, above

Because of limitations on space and staffing to support these visits, the Home will have a limited number of appointments to offer. More visit appointments will be available for visitors who are able to carry out their own Covid tests, as these take up considerably less time to support. The Home will offer any support we are able to when a nominated visitor wishes to learn to carry out these tests for themselves.

Distanced Visits

The Home also has facilities for distanced visits, which may be used if a resident wishes to meet a group of visitors at the same time, or with more than 5 different visitors.

- These may be held in the garden of the Home if the weather permits, and in the conservatory.
- These visits will take place only by appointment. Who will attend each visit must be agreed with the Home prior to each appointment. Visits may be cancelled if unexpected visitors try to attend.
- Visitors must comply with the current Covid restrictions in place, for example visitors may not come to the Home in groups larger than those permitted to gather under current restrictions.

- Visits should take place with appropriate social distancing, without physical contact, and visitors should wear a face covering.
- When visits take place in the conservatory, the visitor must ensure that the screen is between them and the resident for the duration of the visit.

End of Life Visits

End of life care is an important part of what the Home offers to residents and to their loved ones, and we appreciate how important this time is for everyone.

The Home considers End of Live visits to be 'emergency' visits in the context of government guidance. These may therefore take place outside of the usual visiting framework, and even within a resident's isolation period.

Planning for palliative care is a key part of the preparation of the Care Plan for every resident, and next of kin are always notified as soon as any resident moves into the last phase of their life.

At this stage, individualised assessments will be made about visiting arrangements, which would usually include visits at the bedside without social distancing, but with appropriate PPE.

Individualised Assessments

This policy aims to set out a clear policy in order to avoid confusion and set appropriate expectations, and in most cases the Home will seek to apply it consistently and fairly to all residents.

However, the Home also recognises that consideration must also be given to the individual circumstances of each resident, which will include their personal circumstances such as

- the people who are most important to them, an assessment of the risk of those individuals contracting the virus, and how much contact the resident was used to having with them,
- the ability of the resident to participate in telephone and video calls,
- the resident's physical health, and how this is changing over time,
- the cognitive state of the resident and the impact that lack of contact might have on their health and wellbeing.

These two important but conflicting principles will need to be balanced, and we realise that difficult judgements will need to be made.

When circumstances arise which may make it appropriate to permit a visit outside of the above criteria, the Home will need to assess the risks and benefits of the visit, and will keep records of these risk assessments. For example, if a resident has a close friend or family member who lives at a distance and is making a trip to Portsmouth, the Home will consider sympathetically a request for that individual to make a one off visit to the resident.

Ultimately, the Matron will be responsible for the final decision, and she may consult with members of the Trustee board, or with the Portsmouth Care Home Support Team.

Friends and families are asked to be understanding of the Home's need to protect not just them, and the resident they wish to see, but also the other residents and the staff at the Home.

Anyone who would like to request a visit of this kind is asked to contact the Home as soon as possible to discuss the situation as time may be needed to check the latest published guidance or to seek advice.

Visits out of the Home

Government restrictions require that in most circumstances a resident who leaves the Home of Comfort will be isolated (remain in her or his own room without receiving visitors) for a period of 14 days when they return.

There are some exceptions to this rule for specific circumstances which are deemed to be 'low risk'.

- An excursion which is entirely outdoors and does not involve close contact with others, e.g. a walk around a park or to the sea, will not require any period of isolation. Residents are not expected to wear any PPE for such outings.
- Medical appointments which are short in length and in low risk settings do not require isolation on return, but residents (and anybody accompanying them) may be asked to wear PPE, possibly including a mask, during the appointment.

There are some circumstances which will automatically be deemed high risk and which would require the resident to isolate, which include:

- An overnight stay in hospital.
- A visit to a friend or relative which takes place inside, whether that is at a private dwelling or a location such as a restaurant.

The Home is required to risk assess any trip out and to put appropriate measures in place to ensure the safety of the resident going out and other residents at the Home. For this reason, any resident, or friend or relative of a resident, who wishes to arrange a visit out of the Home will need to contact the Home's Matron or Deputy Matron well in advance of the intended visit so that the Home can discuss the situation in detail and make the necessary assessment.

Any resident who makes a trip out of the Home must abide by the general restrictions in place across England at the time, and with any additional restrictions in force locally. For example, during Step 3 residents should not attend indoor gatherings with more than 6 people present.

Testing

This policy has been drawn up on the basis that the current residential setting "Whole Home" antigen testing regime is in operation. Although this does not keep infection out of the Home, fast detection of any infection would be critical to prevent spread.

Smoking

The Home of Comfort is a fully no smoking site, in accordance with current legislation and with NICE guidance. Visitors who wish to smoke must leave the Home's premises to do so, and are asked not to linger outside the Home's gates while smoking.

This policy also applies to the use of e-cigarettes.

Review and Updates

This policy is based on the advice and guidance issued to the Home at the time of writing, and on the latest local infection rate data.

If there are changes to guidance, it will be updated to reflect those changes.

If the local infection rate increases, it may be necessary for the Home to introduce additional visiting restrictions or controls at short notice.

In the event of an outbreak at the Home, all visits will have to cease immediately for the duration of the outbreak. In such circumstances we would be guided by advice from Public Health England and our local care home support team.

All friends and family members of residents are encouraged to receive updates from the Home by:

- Subscribing to our email bulletins (there is a simple form to do this on our website home page, or you can give us your email address),
- Joining our 'friends of the Home' facebook group (There is a link on our website, or we can send this to you by email, skype or WhatsApp)
- Informing us that neither of these methods is convenient for you, so that we know we need to let you know of major changes by some other means.

References

The following information has been used in drawing up this policy:

1. Guidance from the UK government on Visiting In Care Homes:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/visiting-care-homes-during-coronavirus/update-on-policies-for-visiting-arrangements-in-care-homes>
This was last updated on 14th May.
2. Guidance from the UK government on Visits Out Of Care Homes:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/arrangements-for-visiting-out-of-the-care-home/visits-out-of-care-homes>
This was last updated on 14th May.
3. Guidance from the UK government on 'Admission and Care of Residents in a Care Home During Covid-19'
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-admission-and-care-of-people-in-care-homes>
This was last updated on 17th May.
4. Information provided by the local Director of Public Health to Portsmouth Care Homes "Portsmouth Covid-19 Infection Summary" (Not publically released)
This is updated weekly.
5. The Care Provider Alliance Briefing for care providers "COVID-19: Visitors' protocol" published on 19 June 202
6. Guidance from the Portsmouth CCG Care Home Support Team circulated to all care providers in Portsmouth.
7. Guidance received through the Hampshire Care Association, Registered Nursing Home Association and National Care Forum, which includes guidance issued by Hampshire County Council and CCGs, and other commissioning authorities, and developed by advisors for those bodies.