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25 June 2020

Jeane Colleagues

Publication of plans to support phased return to visiting in adult care home services

I want to thank you for your continued commitment to supporting and protecting people in our care homes throughout the COVID pandemic. I am writing to provide an update on visiting in adult care homes as we move out of lock down. We have today published a plan for a phased return to visiting along with guidance to support you in your preparations. Care home residents will be able to receive visitors outside from 3 July, provided the home is COVID free.

I fully appreciate that the necessary restrictions placed on care homes, and the pause on normal activities and routines such as visiting, have been challenging for people living in care homes, their loved ones, and the staff. Such a decision to restrict visitors was not taken lightly, and was informed by scientific advice in order to protect those living and working in care homes from the risk of infection.

I appreciate the efforts you have made to permit families to visit loved ones in their final days and in other exceptional circumstances which is already permitted and it is important that this continues. I am also aware of some of the many innovations that care home providers have put in place to support people's wellbeing and contact with family and friends during these last few months.

Significant progress has been made and we are continuing to see improvements with the number of care homes with ongoing infection reducing. With this in mind, the plan published today confirms that the next stage of visiting will include outdoor visits with a single nominated visitor. If the scientific advice is that it is safe to do so, the next stage would be followed by indoor visits of one key visitor and garden visits with multiple visitors and a relaxation of measures around communal activity with appropriate measures still being observed. The final stage will be controlled indoor and outdoor visiting.

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A local risk assessment to determine a care home's progression through the stages should be undertaken with support from the local Health Protection team and clinical and professional colleagues from the NHS Board and the Local Authority. This should be led by the relevant local Director of Public Health who should give a regular professional assessment of whether visiting is likely to be appropriate within their area, taking into account the wider risk environment.

A care home will only be able to permit visiting if they have been COVID free / or fully recovered as agreed by public health for 28 days from last symptoms of any resident. This is twice the extreme incubation period for the virus and given the possibility of asymptomatic carriage, is the safest estimate of when a home could be declared 'outbreak free'.

I know many of you have, for some time, been planning for this moment. The guidance will support you as you continue to prepare and it includes strategies on ways to facilitate safe visiting. It has been developed by the national Clinical and Professional Advisory Group for care homes. The guidance along with supporting materials can be found here:

www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-adult-care-homes-visiting-guidance


The website includes:

- Plan outlining 4 key stages for a return to visiting and communal activity
- Guidance on visiting arrangements for care homes including sample visiting protocols
- Advice for families and friends to prepare them for visiting

I know this will be important news for you. When the evidence shows that it is the right time to move to the next stage of the plan, we will provide an update. I would stress this can only be done when the evidence allows and we will give clear advice when this can be the case. I would like to take the opportunity to once again thank you for your patience and for all you are doing to promote the wellbeing of those you support.

If you have any questions about this guidance please email:

CareHomesCPAG@gov.scot

Kind regards

JEANE FREEMAN

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