

Date: 11 December 2020

Sent by e-mail

Care Homes and Providers

Dear Colleagues

### **Care home visiting guidance and the use of Lateral Flow Tests (Rapid testing)**

I am writing to update you regarding visiting in care homes. Previously we acknowledged the importance of visiting for the wellbeing of both residents and their friends and family. This continues to be of utmost importance, but I must also stress the importance of balancing this with the risk of infection in these settings.

Nationally, guidance has now been updated and can be reviewed here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/visiting-care-homes-during-coronavirus/update-on-policies-for-visiting-arrangements-in-care-homes>

Care homes are still asked to put in place their own visiting policies, through a dynamic risk assessment, and taking into consideration their own individual layout and facilities, and the specific needs of their residents. Details of how to make this safe are given in the guidance above. We can offer support in this if needed through your care provider hub.

In all cases it is essential that visiting happens within a wider context of robust Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) measures, including ensuring that visitors practice social distancing, hand hygiene and use PPE appropriately. If there is an outbreak in the home visiting should cease for the duration of the outbreak.

Visiting decisions should involve the resident, their family and friends and the provider and other relevant professionals such as social workers or clinicians where appropriate. All decision should be taken in light of general obligations, such as those under the Equality Act 2010 and Human Rights Act 1988, as applicable.

### **Lateral Flow Tests for visitors and the importance of good IPC practice**

National guidance for testing of visitors can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-lateral-flow-testing-of-visitors-in-care-homes/care-home-lfd-testing-of-visitors-guidance>

Testing to support visiting to care homes is being rolled out nationally, and you will be receiving communication regarding this directly from the Department of Health and Social Care. This communication will include details of what needs to be in place in preparation for this, including PPE for visitors, and a specific room for testing. It is important to recognise that this is an innovative technology and hasn't yet been fully tested on a population basis. The results will provide an indication of risk but cannot be relied upon to give complete assurance.

Testing is one part of an approach to reduce the risk of visiting a care home, but it does not mean there is no longer any risk. Visitors who have had a negative result must still wear PPE, practice good infection control measure, and limit physical contact where possible. Physical contact etc is

absolutely not advised as a negative test is unreliable. People with positive tests need to be excluded.

There will need to be clear communication from the home to families regarding both the process of testing that will be in place as well as the ongoing risk and need for continued prevention measure.

CQC registered providers can continue to access PPE via the [government PPE Portal](#) and services can also order from ECC's supply of PPE. This is [available for the holiday period](#) via our [new warehouse location](#) - please see attached [document for further information](#).

Furthermore, The Infection Control Fund and Covid-19 Response Fund are available to help cover the additional costs associated with facilitating visiting and testing. You can find details of [covid-19 financial support available to providers](#) on the provider hub.

Please continue to update the NHS Tracker Data with your information daily as this is used to ensure we can support where needed.

Regular updates will continue to be posted on our [provider hub](#) and via our market bulletins.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge once more the continued efforts of you and your staff to protect our most vulnerable people during this incredibly difficult time.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mike Gogarty', on a light-colored background.

Mike Gogarty  
Director of Public Health