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Guide to risk assessment for visiting into or out of care homes during the coronavirus pandemic

Identifier code: GUI-006

Category: Guidance

Audience: External

Response area:

Responsible author: Health Protection COVID-19 Guidance Group

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Date: 18 November 2021

Status: Live **Version:** 3

Distribution:

- Public Health Wales Website
- PHW response staff
- Registered Care Homes via CIW

Purpose and summary of document:

This document provides guidance to staff and owners of registered care homes on the issues that they will need to consider when undertaking a risk assessment to facilitate visiting into or visits from the home during the coronavirus pandemic. The guidance should be applied in line with the measures in place at the time as set out in the National Coronavirus control Plan and the Coronavirus Control Plan Alert Levels in Wales for Social Care for Adults and Children.

Document location: [Information for Health and Social Care - Public Health Wales \(nhs.wales\)](#)

Archive version location: [Here](#)

1 Introduction

This guidance has been developed to support care homes in undertaking risk assessments to support visiting into and visits out from care homes for older people as well as people with Learning Disability, adults with disability and children during the coronavirus pandemic.

This risk assessment guide should be used in conjunction with the following guidance and plans:

- [Guidance for the prevention and management of cases, incidents and outbreaks of COVID-19 in residential care settings in Wales](#)
- [Welsh Government Guidance on visiting in care homes](#)
- [Coronavirus Control Plan for Social Care](#)

The guidance and risk assessment template can be used at any alert level but will need to be applied to the guidance and permitted level of visiting at the time.

2 Background

Care homes, particularly those for older people, have been particularly vulnerable to infection and unfortunately loss of life during the pandemic. The virus which causes COVID-19 is highly infectious and easily transmitted. This has meant that once it enters a setting it can be very difficult to bring under control. During the Autumn and Winter of 2020/21 even with the experience of the first wave, infection, prevention and control (IP&C) guidance and advice from multi-agency partners, access to PPE, visitor restrictions and regular asymptomatic testing of staff a significant number of care homes experienced outbreaks of COVID-19.

Visitors are an important part of the recovery process for service users and visiting restrictions may lead to long term impacts on their mental health and wellbeing and that of their visitors. However, we must recognise the health, safety and wellbeing of patients, communities and staff and the risk of nosocomial transmission particularly in light of the more transmissible Delta variant

The Coronavirus Control Plan for Social Care makes a number of references to the need for a risk assessed approach to visiting. It is the responsibility of care homes to undertake that risk assessment based on their understanding of the local situation, the needs of the residents and their capacity to facilitate visiting. This guide sets out the issues that care homes

should consider in deciding when and how to permit visiting into and out of the home when that is permitted.

In broad terms a risk assessment will need to consider the following factors:

- The rates of infection at the time in the community e.g. [rolling 7 day average per 100,000 population](#), or in the setting i.e. does it have an ongoing incident
- The resident/s and their degree of vulnerability to infection in addition to the potential impact of not seeing loved ones
- The vaccination status of the resident/s.
- The visit itself, who will be visiting or be being visited, frequency and duration
- Where the visit will take place and the control measures in place



Any visiting within the care home or out into the community, when permitted, must be undertaken in line with the general coronavirus prevention guidance appropriate for the current alert level.

2.1 Visitor testing

Care homes have been provided with lateral flow tests to enable visitors into the home to be tested prior to entering the property. The tests provide a rapid result (within 30 minutes) and individuals who test negative can

enter the setting. Those who test positive cannot visit and should go home immediately and follow Welsh Government guidance for [self-isolation](#). Anyone who tests positive on LFD should be encouraged to take a confirmatory PCR.

2.2 Vaccination

The COVID-19 vaccination programme is progressing well and booster doses of vaccine are now being rolled out. However, while the vaccines are very effective at reducing severe disease and hospital admission, no vaccine is 100% effective and therefore even if residents and visitors have been vaccinated providers should continue to follow current COVID-19 guidance to protect residents and staff.

2.3 Visitor Declaration

All visitors should be asked to complete a declaration on each visit or for each visit out, when permitted. This should ask visitors to declare that each individual visiting or those that will be present on a visit out can answer yes to each of the following statements:

- I am well and I do not have symptoms of COVID-19 (new continuous cough, fever or loss of taste and or/smell)
- I have not tested positive for COVID-19 in the last 10 days
- I have not been asked to isolate as a contact of a positive case in the last 10 days or nobody in my household is displaying symptoms of COVID-19
- I do not work in a setting where COVID-19 is present
- I have not returned from overseas in the last 10 days from a red list country and required to be in quarantine.

3 Undertaking a Risk Assessment

Risk assessments are always context specific which means that if things change it is necessary to review and update them. Each care home should undertake a general risk assessment for visiting to or from the home. They should review this regularly and make amendments if the situation changes. In addition, it will be necessary to risk assess individual visits, particularly during periods where general visiting is not permitted or where residents are leaving the home to visit a public place or a private home.

The template provides guidance on what increases or decreases risk and advice on how risk can be reduced or mitigated. It will not be possible to mitigate all risks and in those situations a best interests decision will need to be made about the importance of the visit at that time.

This guidance has been produced to support visiting as safely as possible by managing and reducing risks and there is an expectation that care homes will facilitate visiting, in line with the guidance at the time, whenever possible. The frequency and duration of visits will be determined by what each individual care home can support.

3.1 Communication

It is important that there is clear and ongoing communication between the care home and the visitors or people being visited to ensure that everyone is aware of the arrangements for the visit and the control measures that are in place for example, the use of testing and PPE.

It is important that there is a shared approach to facilitating visits that are as low risk as possible, families and others supporting visits out of the care home should be willing to work with the home to plan a visit that is as safe as possible.

3.2 Using the template

Templates have been provided in Appendix 1 (Visits into Care Homes) and Appendix 2 (Visits Out of Care Homes). You may use your own risk assessment templates or add additional questions to these.

Guidance is provided in section 3.3 and 3.4 to help in completing each section of the template.

We suggest that you record the relevant information in Column 2 and in Column 3 you note your conclusion and any mitigating steps you plan to take.

You should refer to the guidance listed at the start of this document and other guidance produced and issued subsequently by Welsh Government, Care Inspectorate Wales, Public Health Wales or your Local Authority/Health Board or Incident Management Team.

It is important that you facilitate visits in line with the national guidance at the time.

If you need advice on a specific complex situation or issue your local Health Protection Team or Environmental Health Officer should be able to help.

Neither your local Environmental Health Officer nor Public Health Wales is able to sign off or agree your risk assessment.

3.3 Guidance on completion of the Risk Assessment Template – visiting in care homes

Risk assessment purpose	This should include information about the reason for the risk assessment e.g. is it an overall risk assessment for the home or for a particular resident or activity		
Date	Date of risk assessment	Completed By	

Risk Assessment Area	Guidance	Mitigation
Does the setting currently have an incident or outbreak of COVID-19	<p>During an ongoing incident or outbreak visiting into or out of the home is limited to “essential visitor” only, other than in exceptional circumstances. This is to protect individuals coming into the home and to stop the infection spreading in the wider community.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Essential visitor’s should have been designated pre outbreak/incident so clear who they are. • Visiting is permitted in exceptional circumstances, including but not limited to end of life. Where visits take place on this basis the rest of the risk assessment below should be completed • In the context of visiting during an incident ‘end of life’ visiting would be indicated during the last days/weeks of life. • Window visits are allowed as long as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • care home staff can support this • the layout of the care home means that visitors do not enter the home • the resident can come to a window without exposing other vulnerable residents • the visitor remains two metres from the window

Risk Assessment Area	Guidance	Mitigation
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The window may be opened if visitors maintain a two metre distance. Testing is not required for window visits.
Has the home been advised by the Local Authority or Incident Management Team or Public Health Wales to restrict visiting due to concern about rates of infection in the area?	<p>There may be circumstances where there is concern about a localised outbreak of infection. This may result in additional local visiting restrictions being advised. In these circumstances homes should follow the advice given.</p> <p>Visiting of any kind may not be advised depending on the circumstances.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Visiting is permitted in exceptional circumstances, including but not limited to end of life (see above). Where visits take place on this basis the rest of the risk assessment below should be completed.
Does the setting care for individuals who are extremely clinically vulnerable?	The majority of care homes for older people will care for individuals who are extremely clinically vulnerable due to age and state of health. Care homes providing care for younger people may also include those who are extremely clinically vulnerable.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All extremely clinically vulnerable people & those caring for them should have had the COVID-19 vaccine. However, if the setting still has individuals in this category that have not been vaccinated, they may still be at considerable risk. Some residents wouldn't have been able to have the vaccine. Suggest following stringent IPC measures & visiting outside if possible Where vaccination has been refused the risks should clearly be explained to the individual and/or family

Risk Assessment Area	Guidance	Mitigation
		but this should not prevent visiting for other residents.
Does the setting care for individuals who may find it difficult to comply with or understand the control measures that are in place?	People with dementia or behavioural difficulties may find it difficult to understand the need to keep their distance or wear a face covering for example.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visits should ideally take place in an area that cannot be accessed by the other residents to reduce opportunity for contact with residents. • Visitors should wherever possible not move around the building. • Provide staff to support residents who may find it difficult to comply with preventative measures. • Remind visitors of the need to support their family member in following the control measures as much as possible. • Remind visitors that they may be at risk if the family member is unable to follow control measures.
What is the purpose of the proposed visit? This may be important for individual situations where mitigation is not possible and will help in judging whether there are exceptional circumstances.	<p>It is important that as well as considering the potential risk from visits, the risks or harm from not permitting visits should also be considered.</p> <p>The level of risk that may be tolerated will vary depending on the need for the visit.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visits take place in line with the guidance at the time • Can visiting be supported by an alternative means e.g. outdoor visiting; visiting in an outdoor structure or visitor POD
Who will be visiting?	Always check that visitors are eligible to visit (section 2.3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providers should keep records of all visitors to the home.

Risk Assessment Area	Guidance	Mitigation
	<p>The more people visiting the greater the level of risk.</p> <p>Vaccination status of the visitor should not influence a decision to permit a visit at the current time.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask visitors to complete a visitor declaration. • If larger groups wish to visit e.g. end of life, can people take it in turns? • Consider outdoor visiting or visiting in a visitor pod or outdoor structure which will be a lower risk and can more easily support visiting by a larger group, including children (when permitted). • Visitors should maintain social distancing indoors..
What frequency and duration of visiting is proposed	<p>From an infection perspective the more often someone visits and the longer the time spent the greater the risk of transmission.</p> <p>There will also be practical reasons for reducing frequency and duration to enable fair access and availability of staff to support the process</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider offering a range of different visiting options including outdoor visiting.
Where will the visit take place?	<p>Visits outdoors are lower risk than visits indoors.</p> <p>Indoor visitors should avoid the need to move through the building is at all possible.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visits should, where possible, take place in a designated room to avoid visitors moving around the building. Ideally the designated room is close to the entrance of the building, and well ventilated • visits may take place in people's rooms, if a designated room is not available. The

Risk Assessment Area	Guidance	Mitigation
	The virus is transmitted more easily in poorly ventilated indoor spaces.	<p>window should be open, wherever possible, to ensure adequate ventilation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visitors should wear PPE where there is likely to be more significant close contact with the resident • Enhanced cleaning between visits and at the end of the day. • Visitors who need to travel through the building should be escorted. • Visitors should wear a face covering (unless exempt)
Are there arrangements in place to facilitate safe testing and waiting prior to a visit?	<p>Visitor testing requires an area for the testing to take place and visitors will also need somewhere to wait for the result in line with the guidance.</p> <p>Ideally visitors should not enter the premises until they have a negative test result.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure visitors have received information in advice on the requirement for testing. • If space is limited, testing could take place in an appropriate outdoor building or covered area. • Waiting can take place in vehicles if visitors travelled by car.
Are there arrangements for the donning, doffing & safe disposal of PPE in place where PPE is indicated e.g. visits where there is likely to be significant close contact or visits in exceptional circumstances during an incident	<p>Where the guidance recommends that visitors are supplied with PPE this will need to be available and advice provided on how to safely put it on and take it off. Facilities for safe disposal should also be available.</p> <p>The exact PPE required will be dependent on the activity being undertaken. If visitors are going to</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PPE should always be used if visiting is taking place during an incident or outbreak or when visiting an individual who is COVID positive. • PPE should be worn if visitors are likely to have significant close contact with the resident • IP&C guidance for PPE should always be followed for visitors

Risk Assessment Area	Guidance	Mitigation
	<p>support care provision e.g. help with eating; personal care then this will influence PPE required.</p> <p>Most of the time visitors will not be advised to use PPE, a face covering is sufficient. Ensure that you are clear when each should apply.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social distancing, good hand hygiene and a face covering will mean that in most circumstances PPE is not required (ensure the most up to date guidance is followed at the time).

3.4 Guidance on completion of the Risk Assessment Template – visits out of care homes

Risk assessment purpose	This should include information about the reason for the risk assessment e.g. for a particular resident or type of activity		
Date	Date of risk assessment	Completed By	

Risk Assessment Area	Guidance	Mitigation
Does the setting currently have an incident or outbreak of COVID-19	<p>During an ongoing incident or outbreak visiting into or out of the home is not permitted other than in exceptional circumstances (such as end of life care). This is to protect individuals coming into the home and to prevent further transmission of the COVID-19 virus.</p>	<p>Residents may leave the home for essential reasons, such as urgent medical care. The hospital and ambulance service/transport provider should be advised of the current situation in the setting.. If accompanied by staff and/or family member they should have an appropriate level of PPE depending on risk assessment and in-line with current IPC guidance</p>

Risk Assessment Area	Guidance	Mitigation
Has the care home been advised by the Local Authority or Incident Management Team or Public Health Wales to restrict visiting due to concern about rates of infection in the area?	There may be circumstances where there is concern about a localised outbreak of infection. This may result in additional local visiting restrictions being advised. In these circumstances homes should follow the advice given.	Local restrictions may specify a stay at home or other restriction. These should be followed.
Does the setting care for individuals who are extremely clinically vulnerable?	The majority of care homes for older people will care for individuals who are extremely clinically vulnerable due to age and state of health. In addition care homes looking after younger adults and children may include individuals who are clinically vulnerable.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vaccination has been prioritised for these groups and those caring for them and will reduce the level of risk. If the setting has individuals who have not been vaccinated, they may still be at considerable risk. • Where vaccination has been refused, ensure that those making that decision are aware of the potential risk.
Does the setting care for individuals who may find it difficult to comply with or understand the control measures that are in place?	People with dementia or behavioural difficulties may find it difficult to understand the need to keep their distance or wear a face covering for example.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consideration should be given to the planned visit and whether the individual/s will find it difficult to follow any guidance in the setting being visited. If this is the case consider alternatives, such as virtual visiting. • Avoid crowded locations or visiting public places during busy periods.

Risk Assessment Area	Guidance	Mitigation
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that staff accompanying the visit or relatives are aware of the potential risks and prepared.
What is the purpose of the proposed visit?	<p>Visitors are an important part of the recovery process for service users and visiting restrictions may lead to long term impacts on their mental health and wellbeing and that of their visitors. However, we must recognise the health, safety and wellbeing of patients, communities and staff and the risk of nosocomial transmission</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can the visit be delayed or is there another alternative if visits out are considered high risk? • Can the risk be reduced by changing the location; shortening the visit; visiting at the care home
Who will they be visiting?	<p>Always check that visitors are eligible to visit (section 2.3).</p> <p>Does it include regular visitor/s or wider groups.</p> <p>The more people the individual will have contact with during the visit the greater the risk.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask the person arranging the visit to check that all those involved can comply with the visitor declaration; this should be repeated on return if the visit was for an extended period or overnight. • Ensure that the number of individuals attending is in line with the guidance for that setting at the time, including private homes. • Encourage reducing size of larger groups if indoor venue; taking account of relative size and ventilation. • Ensure that risks to anyone being visited are understood.

Risk Assessment Area	Guidance	Mitigation
What frequency and duration of visit is proposed	<p>From an infection perspective the more often someone visits and the longer the time spent the greater the risk of transmission.</p> <p>Overnight visits and extended stays are also higher risk for infection transmission</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visiting should be allowed according to the alert level and guidance in the visitor guidance. If the alert level moves up from alert level 0 then limitations on visiting may have to be re-introduced.
Where will the visit take place?	<p>Visits outdoors e.g. to a park are lower risk than visits indoors.</p> <p>Indoor visits to public places such as restaurants or shops are lower risk than visits to private homes as they are controlled environments.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check that all of those who will be present during the visit out can complete the visitor declaration if not delay until they can e.g. period of isolation has ended if at all possible. • Visit public places during quieter periods. • Choose indoor venues that are large with well-spaced tables/seating, have good control measures in place and are well ventilated.
How will the resident/s travel to the location?	<p>Travel in a private vehicle or on public transport in close proximity to others is a relatively high risk environment for transmission.</p> <p>The longer the journey the greater the risk.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimise the number of people travelling in the vehicle (driver and one other to provide care if needed). • Ensure that all travelling in the vehicle wear a face covering (if tolerated).

Risk Assessment Area	Guidance	Mitigation
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff transporting residents should wear PPE. • Open windows to ensure good ventilation. • Avoid travelling on public transport at peak times.
<p>Will the resident need to isolate on return to the setting?</p>	<p>Visits out of the home as part of a group with staff exclusively from the setting will not require isolation on return</p> <p>Visits to healthcare settings should be risk assessed on the basis as set out in the guidance.</p> <p>Visits to indoor public places will not require isolation on return.</p> <p>Extended visits in a private home or overnight stay will not require isolation on return.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any individual who has had contact with individuals who have developed symptoms during the visit or tested positive in the 48 hour period immediately following the visit must isolate on return in line with guidance at the time. • In children's homes and those for younger adults with learning disabilities who are not extremely clinically vulnerable daily LFD testing may be used as an alternative to isolation. • Testing can only be used when the resident is symptom free and has not been a close contact of an individual who has tested positive or developed symptoms in the two days following the visit. • LFD testing should take place daily for seven days. This is intended to enable individuals to attend school or other structured activities in line

Risk Assessment Area	Guidance	Mitigation
		with the guidance and recognises that visits with their family will be a regular feature of their care plan or care arrangements.

Risk Assessment Area	Information	Conclusion and mitigation
Does the setting care for individuals who are extremely clinically vulnerable?		
Does the setting care for individuals who may find it difficult to comply with or understand the control measures that are in place?		
What is the purpose of the proposed visit? This is designed to aid risk assessment during periods when routine visiting is not permitted or where there are risks that may not be easily mitigated.		
Who will be visiting?		
What frequency and duration of visiting is proposed?		

Risk Assessment Area	Information	Conclusion and mitigation
Where will the visit take place?		
Are there arrangements in place to facilitate safe testing and waiting prior to a visit?		
Are arrangements for the supply, 'donning and doffing' and safe disposal of used PPE in place, if indicated?		

Risk Assessment Template – visits out of care homes

Risk assessment purpose			
Date		Completed By	
Risk Assessment Area	Initial Questions		
Does the setting currently have an incident or outbreak of COVID-19	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Would the visit be covered by the exceptional circumstances provision?</p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>If yes, complete risk assessment If no, visit should not take place at the current time</p>
Has the home been advised by the Local Authority or Incident Management Team or Public Health Wales to restrict visiting due to concern about rates of infection in the area?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Would the visit be covered by the exceptional circumstances provision?</p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>If yes, complete risk assessment If no, visit should not take place at the current time</p>

Risk Assessment Area	Information	Conclusion and mitigation
Does the setting care for individuals who are extremely clinically vulnerable?		

Risk Assessment Area	Information	Conclusion and mitigation
Does the setting care for individuals who may find it difficult to comply with or understand the control measures that are in place?		
What is the purpose of the proposed visit?		
Who will they be visiting?		
What frequency and duration of visiting is proposed?		

Risk Assessment Area	Information	Conclusion and mitigation
Where will the visit take place?		
How will the resident/s travel to the location?		
Will the resident need to isolate on return to the setting?		