

Dear XX,

Regarding: Visiting family members and friends in residential homes and nursing homes.

We are writing to you to explain what we are doing in Leeds to support families to visit their loved ones in care homes, safely and in line with new Covid-19 government guidance.

We know this year has been a difficult time for many people living in care, for their loved ones, family and friends. Over the past months, work has been ongoing both locally and nationally to improve the safety of residents in care homes and to enable safe visiting.

The Government updated its guidance for visiting in care homes on the 2nd of December 2020. This is the latest in a series of updates to allow residents in care homes to receive visits – in a Covid safe and secure way. This new guidance introduces, alongside measures already in place, Lateral Flow Tests (LFT's) which are a test to see if a visitor has COVID at the time of the visit..

Previously, visiting in care homes was restricted to protect the residents, staff and visitors from the risk of Covid infection and spreading the virus to others, the new guidance is about allowing, COVID safe and secure, visiting.

'COVID safe and secure' means minimising the risk of passing the COVID infection to someone else which is essential for all visiting.

The Lateral Flow Tests will sit alongside the already established visiting practices in care homes, which will continue to be offered as an alternative to tested visits.

Some examples of these established visiting practices include:

- Pre-booked time slots to allow visits to be managed.
- Thorough cleaning between visits.
- Open air visits wherever possible.
- Visitor and resident to remain at least 2 meters apart at all times.
- Visits can take place at a window.
- Appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) must be used if a visit takes place in and around the care home building and grounds.
- Some providers have used temporary outdoor structures – sometimes referred to as 'visiting pods'

- Use of a dedicated room, such as a conservatory or a room that can be entered directly from outside.
- Ensuring good ventilation for any spaces used - for example, keeping doors and windows open where safe to do so and using ventilation systems at high rates but only where these circulate fresh air.

COVID testing is not required for the above as long as the COVID safe and secure visiting methods are adhered to.

The introduction of Lateral Flow Tests will offer the potential for closer contact between families, friends and residents, for example without barriers but still requiring Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), wearing a mask. The guidance is to be able to offer tests to up to two visitors, twice per week, per resident. Lateral flow tests, if self-administered, are shown to have only an accuracy of 58%. This is causing some concern amongst care homes as to the safety of relying on this test for visiting.

Due to this inaccuracy some care homes may choose not to use single Lateral Flow Tests and may wish to use the PCR (Lab based tests) instead, or use the Lateral Flow Tests and PCR lab tests as part of a dual testing strategy (2 tests a couple of days apart). This approach does provide greater assurance of reduced risk of cross infection, but also requires extra resources and will impact on the availability of visits.

The guidance is clear, for all types of visiting there should be **one constant individual (where possible) with a maximum of two consistent visitors**. This means the same family members or friends visiting each time. This is in order to limit the overall number of visitors to the care home and/or to the individual, reducing consequent risk of disease transmission from multiple different routes.

The Lateral Flow Tests can be administered at the care homes and have a 30 minute result time, picking up on asymptomatic transmission. The full testing process takes between 45 minutes and one hour to complete. During the test visitors must provide signed consent for the test and the sharing of information, wear PPE and be registered on the NHS Track and Trace website. Following the test the visitor must then either wait outside the care home or in a room provided for the purpose until they get the result.

Care Homes in Leeds are working hard to prepare their teams and their premises to safely introduce Lateral Flow and other tests to visitors, but they must be able to do this whilst still providing safe and effective care to their residents. This will mean that the speed of implementing the tests will depend on the situation in each care home, staffing, layout and the needs of their residents. Care Homes are working hard to be able to offer testing safely as soon as possible.

To help manage the situation care homes should keep families and friends informed of the progress made on implementing the guidance and with visiting in general.

To ensure visitors understand the process for testing care homes will be provided with a letter fully explaining the process to send to families prior to the visit.

Visitors that test negative, when combined with other infection prevention and control measures, such as personal protective equipment (PPE), could allow for more meaningful visits with your relative or friend, including where possible indoor visits and close contact. The LFTs are not 100% accurate which is why it is important that relatives use PPE and good infection control protocols.

Visitors that test positive will be immediately required to leave the premises and isolate, alongside the rest of their household and support bubble, as per the government guidance, with the results of the test being passed to NHS Test and Track for follow up.

The new guidance states that if there is a COVID outbreak in the home, which means that there are 2 or more cases, staff or resident, the home should move to stop all visits, except in exceptional circumstances such as end of life.

Leeds City Council are now working with and supporting care homes to implement this new guidance to help care home residents have safe COVID secure visiting from their loved ones.

For details of the updated government guidance and Leeds City Council guidance for social care providers please see below:

- Leeds City Council guidance for social care providers on visiting care homes. To view this guidance please visit: <https://www.leeds.gov.uk/care-quality-team/guidance-for-visiting>
- Leeds City council guidance on Supporting Residents' Wellbeing during COVID-19. To view this guidance please visit: <https://www.leeds.gov.uk/care-quality-team/wellbeing>
- National guidance is under continual review and is published and updated here:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/visiting-care-homes-during-coronavirus/update-on-policies-for-visiting-arrangements-in-care-homes>
- 29th November guidance on Christmas visiting to care homes
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/guidance-for-the-christmas-period#visiting-relatives-in-care-homes>

If any of the issues in this letter affect you and you would like to discuss with an independent organisation, or seek clarification:

Age UK Leeds reception team are available Monday-Friday 9am-4pm on 0113 3893000 or 0113 3893010 or Email FrontofHouse@ageukleeds.org.uk

Carers Leeds can be contacted on Phone number: 0113 3804300 or Email advice@carersleeds.org.uk

Leeds City Council Care Quality Team can be contacted via Email at Carequality@leeds.gov.uk

Healthwatch Leeds provides an information service to help people understand and access health and care services in the Leeds area. Our trained staff can help you to:

- Find out about health and care services near to you
 - Understand your options if you have a concern or complaint
 - Share feedback with us about services. This helps us see the bigger picture so that we can better influence changes in services.
- Tel: 0113 8980035 (9am-4pm weekdays) or
email: info@healthwatchleeds.co.uk

<https://healthwatchleeds.co.uk/advice-and-info/>

Signed:

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Adults and Health Directorate

Leeds City Council