

8 December 2020

Dear Colleague

CARE HOME VISITING – POSITION STATEMENT 8 DECEMBER 2020 Revision 1

As you will be aware, revised national guidance on visiting for care homes was published on 1 December 2020. It continues to recognise the benefits of visiting on wellbeing and quality of life for residents, but also highlights the continued risk to health of Covid-19 for both residents and staff in care homes.

The Council issued a holding statement, encouraging visitors to be patient whilst you work through the new guidance and its implications. This can be found [here](#).

The full [updated guidance for visiting arrangements in care homes](#) sets out a continued requirement for your dynamic risk assessments to take into account the advice of the Director of Public Health (DPH) for Birmingham, based on the local position. However, the most significant change is the introduction of Lateral Flow Testing (LFT) prior to all visits.

Some homes have already received LFT kits and details of training, however we are expecting all care homes to receive these in the next 7 – 10 days. This means that in line with the national guidance and with immediate effect, unless visits can be conducted outdoors or with substantial screens, then they should not happen until you commence LFT prior to each visit.

This Position Statement applies with immediate effect and will be reviewed regularly in line with national guidance and any significant changes in the local Covid-19 situation.

This advice covers all adult care homes in Birmingham. It does not cover supported living or extra care settings or other residential settings such as children's care homes. National guidance for visits in supported living settings for adults is available [here](#).

Current Covid-19 Situation in Birmingham

The advice of the Director of Public Health (DPH) and Director of Adult Social Care (DASS) as set out below, is based on careful consideration of the current Covid-19 situation in Birmingham including:

- Weekly number of tests completed in the community
- Proportion of tests which are positive for Covid-19
- Cumulative and weekly number of infections in Birmingham, including the 7 day rate per 100,000 population
- The number of deaths due to Covid-19 among Birmingham residents
- Local intelligence on clusters and outbreaks across the City
- The number of new outbreaks in Birmingham care homes
- The number of staff and residents with Covid-19 in Birmingham care homes
- Local intelligence on care home outbreaks

Levels of Covid-19 remain high in Birmingham and are higher than national rates overall. There is evidence that it is being transmitted between individuals through everyday contact. Although after the period of national restrictions and confirmation that Birmingham is now in Tier 3 restrictions, the number of confirmed Covid-19 cases in Birmingham has reduced by 14.9% between 26 November and 2 December 2020 with the current published rate for Birmingham in the week up to 2 December 2020 being 190.7 cases / 100,000 people, this has decreased from 332 cases / 100,000

since the 7 November. Our rate of testing is increasing however the number of people testing positive is also increasing.

Within our care homes, the number of staff and residents contracting Covid-19 is still rising and the number of care homes with significant outbreaks also remains high. With whole home testing now regularly established in the majority of care homes, Covid-19 cases are being identified quickly. However local data as at 2 December 2020 shows that 814 staff and residents have either confirmed or suspected Covid-19, up from 443 staff and residents on 17 November. . Across Birmingham around a third of all care homes currently have an outbreak of Covid-19.

So the Covid-19 situation nationally and locally remains challenging. However care homes and their staff, along with partners across the City, have worked tirelessly to implement infection control regimes, including whole home testing. Whilst we must continue to stay focussed on these measures, the potential risk from allowing visits in care homes needs to be balanced with the impact on the wellbeing of residents and their families.

Advice of the Director of Public Health and Director of Adult Social Care is that:

Due to continuing high levels of community transmission of Covid-19, **wherever possible visits should continue to take place virtually through the use of technology; outdoors maintaining social distancing; or indoors where there are substantial screens.** These remain the safest ways to support visiting in care homes. However, it is recognised that this may not be in the best interests of all residents and **where individual risk assessments have identified the need for 'in-person' visits, the [national guidance](#) should be followed.**

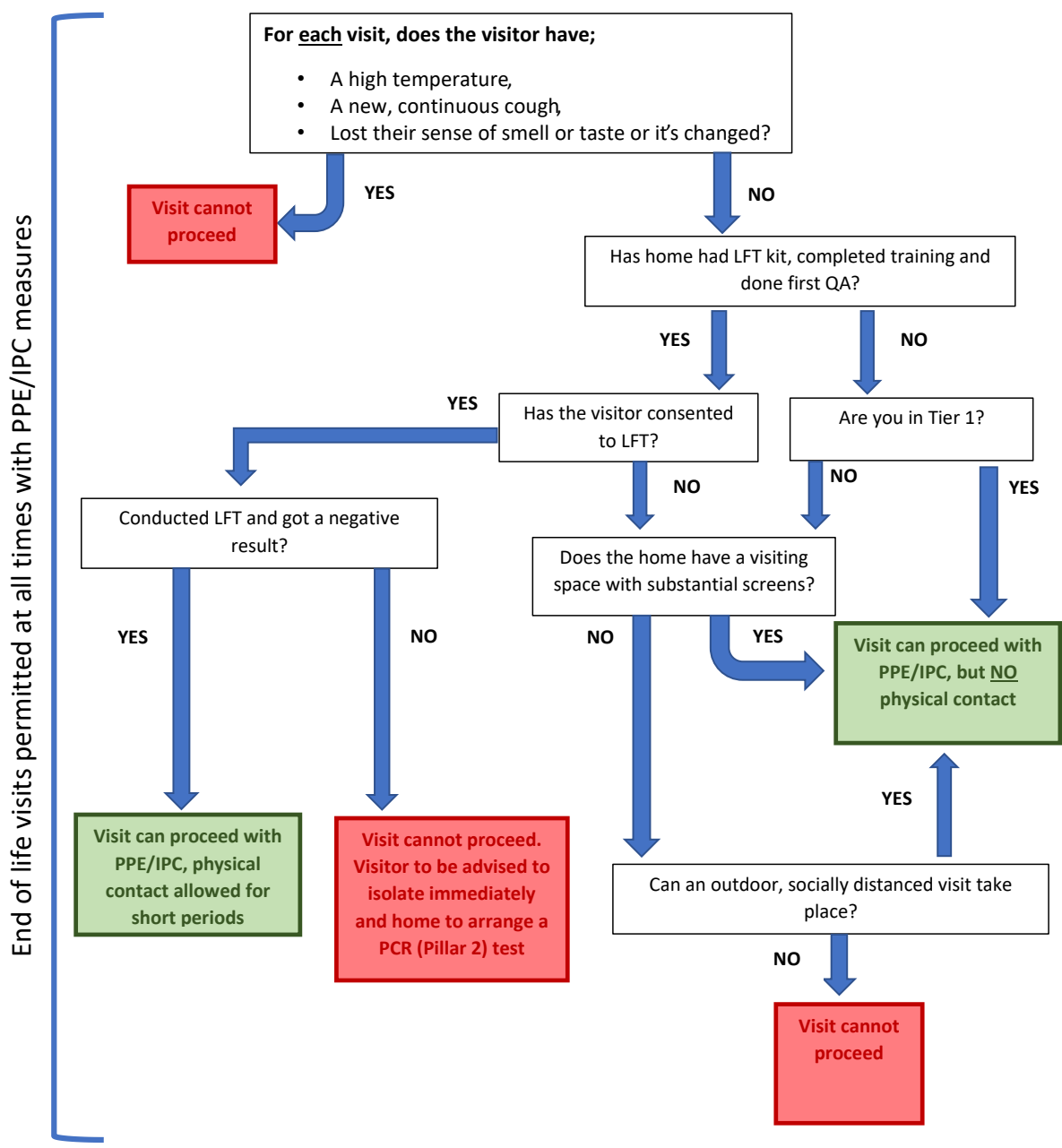
When considering arrangements for 'in-person' visits - as set out in the national guidance - **all care homes should include the following as part of their dynamic risk assessment;**

- whether any staff or residents are currently Covid positive or are symptomatic or if there have been 2 or more confirmed cases that are linked in the last 28 days;
- the balance of potential risk from allowing visits, with the needs of individual residents through both a dynamic risk assessment and individual risk assessment
- compliance with whole home testing for staff (weekly) and residents (monthly) and the results of these tests
- the effectiveness of Covid-19 case reporting arrangements including daily updates of the national capacity tracker and reporting to PHE
- compliance with infection control standards and measures including hand hygiene, PPE and cleaning routines
- ability to safely manage visitor numbers and maintain social distancing throughout the home by staff, residents and visitors
- use of Lateral Flow Testing kits for all visitors where all of the above measures are already robustly established

In an outbreak (i.e. if any care home experiences two or more linked suspected/confirmed cases of Covid-19 among residents or staff) **visits should be stopped (unless exceptional circumstances such as end of life visits).** Visits should only resume 28 days after the last confirmed case and following consultation with Public Health England. For clarity if there are 2 staff cases where they have not been on shift together, they work on separate floors, these are not considered linked cases.

The following flowchart summarises the process to be followed and the circumstances in which visiting should be supported:

- Before any visits can take place, home must have the following;
- Visitor policy
 - Dynamic risk assessment
 - Individual risk assessments
 - PPE supplies
 - No current Covid outbreak
 - Pillar 2 testing in place
 - Not had notice from DPH
 - Social distancing measures
 - Robust IPC measures



Outward Visiting from Care Homes

We are also aware of a number of care home residents who would usually leave the care home setting to stay with friends or family as part of their care and support plans. National guidance has now been published on [outward visiting from care homes](#) which sets out:

- Outward care home visiting guidance only applies to working age care home residents
- Can only take place where local restrictions allow the type of contact planned e.g. if in Tier 3 no indoor household mixing, but can meet outdoors in groups of up to 6

- For period 23 – 27 December, working age care home residents can mix with only 1 household and cannot form a 3 Household Christmas Bubble
- The resident and entire host-household must have negative Lateral Flow Test immediately before the outward visit takes place
- The resident will have to isolate for 14 days on return to the care home
- Where there is an outbreak in the care home – there is no outward visiting for residents until 28 days after the last confirmed Covid case

How to Get In Touch

For further support in relation to Covid-19 for care providers, please visit our dedicated web pages. This also contains a range of resources that can support decision making in relation to care home visiting and can be found at:

www.birmingham.gov.uk/stm

You should also receive our weekly care provider bulletin with updates on the latest guidance and support available, these can also be found here.

<https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/blog/stm-bulletin>

Should you have any questions about this letter or it's contents please contact the Council by email at:

marketintelligence@birmingham.gov.uk

Alternatively your Area Commissioner will be more than happy to discuss with you.

We very much recognise both the incredible efforts of yourselves and your teams in caring for your residents and the further pressures and challenges you face as we enter this new phase of rapid testing and the welcome news regarding vaccination rollout. Please do contact us using the details above if there is any support we can offer you at this challenging time.

Yours sincerely

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