

Visiting care homes in Havering – from Monday 8 March 2021

A message from the Director of Public Health, Mark Ansell, and the Director of Adult Social Care & Health, Barbara Nicholls.

We recognise how hard it has been over the last 12 months for our vulnerable residents living in care homes and supported living schemes, as well as other settings such as sheltered housing and extra care settings. It's also been very difficult for families and friends of these vulnerable residents. And for so many, loved ones have been lost in our care homes, with all the heartbreak and grief that then follows. Families and other loved ones are an important part of keeping our residents wellbeing and health as best as possible in care homes, so the last year has meant some incredibly difficult decisions for government, local councils and care homes as we, as a nation, navigated our way through the challenges of the pandemic.

The council is therefore delighted that relatives and friends will be able to see their loved ones again from Monday 8 March 2021. However our care homes are not opening their doors in the same way as before Covid-19. Government guidance has been issued that sets out clear rules for care homes and the council to follow, so that we can continue to ensure our most vulnerable residents are safe – the last thing in the world any of us would want to see is visitors introducing COVID-19 into any of our care homes.

Guidance for care homes can be found [here](#)

Guidance for visitors can be found [here](#)

These rules won't be like this forever, and they will be kept under constant review over the coming weeks and months. In the same way the Government wants the wider lockdown to ease at the right pace as directed by the data, the Government also wants to assess the impact of steady and planned opening of care homes, and similar settings, in terms of the impact on positive case rates and illness within care homes. They will also review changes to the rate of hospital admissions of care home residents.

The council has been working with our valued care home partners to ensure readiness for receiving visitors. In order to prepare for visiting, there is much that our care homes will need to have in place, including the right space in the home for visiting to happen, the facility to undertake testing of all visitors, and a thorough cleaning regime between visits. This is not intended to be a hindrance to anyone who wants to see their relative, but is necessary to continue to protect care home residents from the risk of catching COVID-19, and is balanced carefully against the absolute need for residents and their families to see one another in person again.

Care homes in Havering are already working with their residents and families about how the process will work from Monday 8 March 2021. Not all care homes will open for visiting on this day but they are working hard to be ready as soon as they can, with some aiming for a week later i.e. Monday 15th March. We are supportive of all care homes ensuring they have completed a full risk assessment of their setting and making sure they can support visiting safely, in a COVID secure way. Care homes must reassure themselves that they have the right controls in place to meet the requirements of the government guidance to keep their residents safe.

Care homes also must consider an individual risk assessment of all their residents in developing plans with residents and their loved ones on visiting arrangements.

For some care homes there will be circumstances that will prevent them from opening from Monday 8 March, such as they are currently managing an 'outbreak' where residents and/or staff have had a recent positive case in their setting. The council's Public Health Team will work with all such settings on planning and agreeing the date they can open for visiting based on government guidance.

There will be occasions over the coming weeks and months (for as long as the guidance published on 4 March 2021 remains in place) that councils may ask care homes to suspend visiting for a period of time. This will happen if there is discovery of positive cases amongst residents or staff in the future. As per government guidance, the Director of Public Health may on other occasions recommend or direct visiting to be suspended under circumstances where it is thought the risks to residents from COVID-19 has increased. Please see our local Policy [here](#).



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