

Care home residents to be reunited with families by Christmas

- Visits out to family homes or outdoor spaces like parks may also be possible for some care home residents under 65
- Safe care home visits to be supported by the provision of over a million rapid tests and free personal protective equipment (PPE)

Care home residents in all tiers will be able to see their families again this Christmas period as over a million tests are to be sent out providers over the next month, with visits to begin in the first homes tomorrow (Wednesday 2 December).

A significant increase in testing capacity, paired with new testing technology, will allow friends and family to visit relatives in care homes if they receive a negative result prior to the visit.

The move will enable care homes to safely maintain a balance between infection control and the vital benefits of visiting to the health and wellbeing of residents.

Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock said:

I know how difficult it has been for people in care homes and their families to be apart for so long. The separation has been painful but has protected residents and staff from this deadly virus.

I'm so pleased we are now able to help reunite families and more safely allow people to have meaningful contact with their loved ones by Christmas.

This news has been made possible by the unprecedented strides made in testing technology and capacity, as well as extra PPE supplies.

It will still be critical for visitors to wear appropriate PPE and follow other infection-control measures within the care home to keep their loved ones, other residents and staff safe.

An extra 46 million items of free PPE will be sent to CQC-registered care home providers through the government portal in addition to PPE already available. Over 220 million items of PPE have been provided to adult care homes since April.

The number of tests kits being supplied has been modelled to allow up to 2 visitors per resident, visiting twice a week. Care homes will manage the number of visits to ensure they can enable safe visiting and the programme will be continuously reviewed as it is rolled out. Visitors will still be expected to follow infection prevention and control procedures. Visitors

should minimise contact as much as possible to reduce the risk of transmission.

Minister for Care Helen Whately said:

COVID-19 is a cruel virus that has torn families apart and denied so many the simple human pleasure of contact with a loved one, which means everything to so many living in care homes.

My focus is on making sure good quality care can still be provided to everyone who needs it, while keeping carers and the people they look after safe.

It is impossible to eliminate risk entirely, but now thanks to an enormous expansion of testing capacity and a huge delivery of free PPE we can help to more safely reunite families throughout December.

More than a million lateral flow tests have already been sent out to the 385 biggest care homes as the first tranche of a phased approach to make visits safer.

The government is also publishing [new guidance allowing some residents under 65 to spend time with their families at Christmas outside of care homes](#).

Working-age residents may be able to join their families in their homes subject to an individual risk assessment, a negative test before leaving and a period of self-isolation upon return. However, they may only form a bubble with one other household and should not form a 3-household Christmas bubble at any point.

If anyone planning to visit a care home develops symptoms they must of course cancel the visit, self-isolate and [get a test](#).

The adult social care sector has been prioritised for the roll-out of testing, and care homes have been one of the first groups to be given access to repeat asymptomatic testing, with 120,000 tests a day ring-fenced for regular care home testing. Following this one-off push of test kits throughout December, care homes will be able to order more rapid tests in a similar way to the current ordering process.

In addition, the government is expanding regular COVID-19 testing to all CQC inspectors to help support their ongoing work.

Professor Martin Green OBE, Chief Executive, Care England, said:

As the largest representative body for independent providers of adult social care, Care England is pleased that the government has responded to the needs of the sector. In order for these promising plans to land successfully, the sector must now be adequately

supported by the government. Care England has always supported meaningful contact between families and residents, whilst recognising that the balance between freedom and safety needs to be explored at the most granular level possible.

We appreciate the continued risks associated with visits, but this represents a positive step forwards. The most important relationships in most people's lives are with their families or other people, where love and trust are shared.

Ian Trenholm, Chief Executive at the Care Quality Commission (CQC), said:

Today's announcement from the Department of Health and Social Care will be welcomed by many families who will now be able to see their loved ones over Christmas, and to care providers who will be secure in the knowledge they are keeping their residents safe.

Person-centred care has never been more important and recognising that part of people's identity and wellbeing comes from their relationships is key. Being able to visit friends and family in person wherever possible is at the heart of this and that is why we have encouraged care providers to support visiting as best they can whilst keeping people safe.

We are also delighted to be able to offer the additional assurance to care providers that our inspectors will be getting weekly testing for COVID-19, following the Department for Health and Social Care's decision to offer testing to key workers.

It is vital we continue to work together to meet the continued challenges of the pandemic and keep people safe.

[Updated care home visiting guidance](#)

All care homes currently registered on the PPE portal will be sent a one-off push totalling 11.5 million aprons, 23 million gloves and 11.7 million masks, with the first care homes having received them this week.

Social care providers can currently access free COVID-19 PPE supplies by accessing the government's [PPE portal](#).

The order limits will be raised in due course to accommodate the extra demand that visitors will bring.

In the event of an outbreak in a care home, or evidence of community hotspots or outbreaks, care homes should rapidly impose visiting restrictions to protect vulnerable individuals.