

Visiting arrangements in Care Homes: Islington position

Version 4.1: 10 December 2020

UPDATE: As of 00.01am on Wednesday 2 December, local restrictions (Tier 2: High alert) replace the national restrictions in England.

New national guidance on visiting arrangements in care homes applies from 2 December 2020.

Care home providers in Islington should continue to enable residents visits from their family and friends in a COVID-secure way through outdoor visits and 'screened' visits. We are currently reviewing the evidence on the role of lateral flow devices (tests) before making a recommendation on their role in testing visitors on arrival to local care homes as an additional protective measure.

An individual care home's policy on visiting arrangements will be based on a dynamic risk assessment taking into account the individual needs of residents, risk of COVID-19 transmission, physical and other unique features of the home, and the advice of the local Director of Public Health (DPH).

A copy of the visiting arrangements in care homes guidance can be found online at [Gov.UK](https://www.gov.uk).

1. Background

The [updated guidance for visiting arrangements in care homes](#) set out a requirement that a provider's dynamic risk assessment should take into account advice of local Director of Public Health (DPH).

This DPH position statement replaces the previously published local guidance or position statements on care home visits. This guidance applies for the period of the local restrictions beginning 2 December 2020. From 2 December 2020 London enters [Tier 2: High alert](#).

This assessment covers all adult care homes in the borough. It does not cover supported accommodation or other residential settings. National guidance for visits in supported living settings is available [here](#).

This assessment will be kept under regular review, and any change will be communicated directly to homes. If local restrictions change or if the national care home visiting guidance is updated this assessment is updated as necessary. The assessment and subsequent updates will also be published on the council website.

2. Scope

The following **borough level** data forms the framework on which the local view on visiting policies is based:

- Weekly number of tests completed in the community
- Positivity rate for testing (proportion of tests which are positive for Covid-19)
- Cumulative and weekly number of infections in Islington, including 7 day rate per 100,000
- The proportion of cases successfully contacted under NHS Test and Trace
- Number of deaths due to Covid-19 among Islington residents
- Local intelligence on clusters and outbreaks in the borough

The local position is also be informed by regular review of the following **care home** data:

- The number of current infections among care homes residents and staff
- The number of recent infections, and date of onset in last symptomatic or confirmed case of Covid-19 among residents or staff members.

3. Governance

The data on which this assessment is based will be kept under regular review by the Islington Covid-19 Health Protection Group, which forms part of the Islington Prevention and Outbreak Management Plan governance structure and is chaired by the Director of Public Health. Any changes to the visiting policy will be agreed by the Islington Covid-19 Health Protection Group, which includes representatives from the following organisations:

- Public Health, Islington Council
- Adult Social Care, Islington Council
- Emergency Planning, Islington Council
- Islington Directorate, North Central London CCG
- Environmental Health, Islington Council
- Communications, Islington Council
- Schools and early years, Islington Council

4. General local visiting position for care homes in Islington

In line with other London boroughs, Islington has seen an increase in community rates of Covid-19 since August. The current weekly new case rate in Islington is 122.9 per 100,000 population (lower than London's rate is at 183.6 per 100,000). The proportion of people who test positive in Islington who are successfully followed by the NHS Test and Trace service is 81%. The latest estimated R number for London as of 29 November 2020 is 0.9-1.1. An R number of 1 means that on average every person who is infected will infect 1 other person, meaning the total number of new infections is stable. Local data is regularly reviewed and informs the DPH position. Any updates to local policy on care home visits as well as local data can be viewed on the [council website](#).

Care homes in Islington and the health and care services that support them have faced enormous challenges through the Covid-19 pandemic, and have had to quickly adapt to implement new infection control regimes, including PPE, social distancing measures and the national whole home testing programme for residents and staff.

While these measures do not mean that we can become complacent, the risks from allowing visits in care homes needs to be balanced with the impact on wellbeing of residents and their families and the importance of social connections in maintaining wellbeing.

As such, the view of the Director of Public Health is that **residents are allowed to receive visits from their family and friends in a COVID-secure way through outdoor visits and 'screened' visits**. It is essential that all visits are done in a way that adheres to the important infection control precautions set out in the update on policies for visiting arrangements – available [HERE](#).

The guidance provides the option of 'Indoor visiting supported by testing'. A negative test using Lateral Flow Devices (LFDs) does not eliminate the risk of COVID-19 transmission. If LFDs are used to support indoor visits, it is important that visitors adhere to using PPE, social distancing where possible, good hygiene and take immediate actions in the event of a positive test. However, **the DPH is currently reviewing the evidence on LFDs before making a recommendation concerning their role in testing visitors on arrival to local care homes as an additional protective measure. Social Care Commissioners and Public Health are supporting care homes to implement this safely.**

In an outbreak i.e. if any care home experiences two or more connected suspected or 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.

When undertaking a risk assessment for certain groups of residents or individuals with particular needs, where undertaking COVID-secure visits is challenging, a tailored visiting policy is needed following the advice set out in the new national guidance. It is important that the provider communicates with family and friends regarding the care home's visitation policy.

The Director of Public Health also supports essential visiting of external professionals where this would benefit residents' health and wellbeing. Decisions on visitation should be personalised, risk-based, and account for residents' human rights in instances where face-to-face delivery provides additional benefit than when provided remotely. Consideration should be given to undertaking support digitally or remotely to minimise infection prevention and control risks."

Please email CIPHAdmin@islington.gov.uk if you have any questions on this.

Jonathan O'Sullivan, Director of Public Health for Islington (10 December 2020)