



Frequently asked questions (FAQs) – care homes in England

The UK Government has announced that visiting will start indoors once again in England's care homes from 8 March. The visits will include the use of Lateral Flow Device (LFD) tests for visitors.

It is hoped these FAQs will support you to understand the approach being taken by MHA with regard to visits and visitor testing. We will keep our approach to visiting under review as and when more information comes through.

What sort of visits will there be?

We have identified three types of visits for our care homes. These are detailed below.

1. Essential Family Carer visits (EFC)

We define an EFC as *'a resident's family member or friend whose care for a resident is an essential element of maintaining their mental or physical health. Without this input a resident is likely to experience significant distress or continued distress'*.

These are full contact visits where the relative or friend is tested at the same level as a staff member - Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) and Lateral Flow Device (LFD) - and where they are helping provide care for an individual, such as help with meals. In addition, the visitor wears the same level of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) as a care worker.

EFC visits have been able to continue throughout the lockdown unless the home has been in 'outbreak' or where this has been advised against by Public Health. End of life care visits fall within this description and have been facilitated throughout the pandemic.

2. Limited Contact visits - one named visitor per resident

This is the new type of visit announced by the Government that is due to come into operation from 8 March. It will allow for limited personal contact, such as hand holding. Each resident will have one named visitor, who will need to have a LFD test before being allowed to enter the care home. If the test is negative, they will be able to have a limited contact visit, wearing the appropriate PPE, observing social distancing when not hand holding and in a well ventilated area.

Whilst it is anticipated that the guidance will allow for a weekly visit by the named visitor, the experience of homes which piloted visits similar to these in December 2020 was that the logistics involved in testing, supporting the visit and maintaining the cleanliness of the visiting area limited the number of possible visits to between four and six visits per day.

3. Screen, pod, booth and outdoor visits

When not in an outbreak situation or under local restrictions, many of our care homes have been able to continue visits by relatives and friends as long as they are carried out behind screens indoors or in one of our specially-designed pods or booths. These visits will continue after 8 March without the need for visitors to have a LFD test, but will have to continue to be non-contact visits.

And as we start to move into Spring and hopefully warmer weather, we will once again be able to start up socially distanced, outdoor visits without the need for screens, as we did last summer.

These types of visits will provide an additional alternative if homes are unable to facilitate the weekly contact visits due to capacity issues.

What is LFD testing?

Lateral Flow Device (LFD) testing involves a swab of the nose and throat to collect a sample. This is then inserted into a tube of liquid for a short time. Drops of this liquid are then added to a test strip and after about half an hour a result will be shown.

Our staff use LFD tests twice a week and once a week carry out a laboratory checked test, Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR). This is the one which residents also have once a month.

How will I know that the tests are being completed correctly?

MHA staff who will be carrying out the tests will have completed the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) training and will have been competency assessed to use the LFD tests. They are also experienced in carrying out the throat and nose swabs for the tests carried out on residents and colleagues.

How will I get tested using an LFD?

Once LFD tests are on site for visiting, you will firstly need to talk to the home about booking a visiting time and date with the home. On the day you will be asked to arrive at the care home with a clean mask on and one hour prior to your planned visit

You will remain in your car and pull up to the testing station where a member of the care home team will check your temperature, provide information to you (if you haven't already received this) and ask you to then read and sign a consent form before being tested. You will need to declare that you do not have COVID-19 symptoms. You will need to wait in your car for around half an hour until your test result is available.

You must not leave your own home to visit the care home if you have a current COVID-19 positive test or if you have symptoms of COVID-19 (a fever, new continuous cough, changes in sense of taste or smell and / or any symptom(s) of other infections) or if you have been instructed by NHS test and trace to self-isolate. What will be the difference if I have an LFT test prior to visiting?

If you test negative then this is an additional screening process to protect your loved one from Covid-19 infection. A negative result means that you will be able to have limited contact with your loved one through the holding of hands.

Will I also need to have been vaccinated to have a limited contact visit?

Covid-19 vaccinations are being rolled out quickly throughout the UK population. Having a vaccine gives an added layer of safety when having a contact visit with a loved one so we would urge you to have the vaccine when you are offered it. However, we are not making this a requirement for a limited contact visit.

Where will I be able to see my loved one?

This will be dependent on a risk assessment and a personalised visiting plan. However; most visits will take place in visitor spaces already identified by the home. Those receiving end of life care and those who are cared for in their bed will be able to receive a visit at the bedside.

If I don't have an LFT, does that mean I can't visit my loved one?

Whether or not you have a test, MHA will continue with current arrangements to enable visiting, for example outside visits, use of visiting pods or use of an indoor visiting space separated by screens. The booking system will continue.

How many visitors can a resident have?

Under the new guidance, each resident can have one named visitor who is to be tested for a limited contact visit.

How long will I be able to visit for?

You will be allocated a 30 minute visiting slot per week initially. However, the experience of homes where visiting has been backed by LFD tests is that a maximum of six visits can take place in a day. This means that in our larger care homes, you might only get a contact visit every few weeks.

You will, however, be able to continue having visits in our pods and booths or indoors using screens. When the warmer weather comes, you will also be able to have outdoor visits.

Is there a time when I will not be able to visit?

You will not be able to visit when the home is in COVID-19 outbreak, meaning there are staff and/or residents with COVID-19. The home will be closed to all visitors unless there are exceptional circumstances such as visiting a person who is receiving end of life care. It is always wise to check the status of the home before setting off to visit.

What happens if I am tested using the LFD and the test result is positive?

Unfortunately you will not be able to enter the home and you will be required to have a further PCR test that will be sent off for analysis. You will be required to self-isolate until you receive the result. If the result from this second test comes through as positive then you will remain in isolation for a full 10 days post the positive test and you will be advised by NHS Test and Trace, who will also advise you with regard to your contacts.