

Older People and Medically Vulnerable groups at increased risk of contracting Covid:- Allowing Visitation to people's homes.

A significant element of the State's action has been to protect older people and medically vulnerable groups at risk of contracting Covid. This has been based on the universal aspect of strict 'isolating' and 'stay at home' messages, enhanced for these groups by the addition of the cocooning policy.

Overall this has significantly contributed to the control of the disease in Ireland. However, evidence from across the country has revealed repeatedly the impact of this social isolation has been having on those groups that are cocooning, with the loss of visitation. This includes mental health issues such as depression and anxiety, as well as health issues that arise from not being able to mobilise as people would normally do when they have visitors. These issues can then manifest in behaviours of distress.

Principles used in this guidance are as follows:

1. All adults have a right to make their own choices in relation to all aspects of their lives including visitors coming to their homes.
2. Visiting arrangements should be made in advance and agreed with other individuals in the home.
3. Individuals and their visitors have a right to be and to feel safe and secure in their home, therefore it is important to ensure that visitors are respectful to people living in the home and those working there.
4. The infection control risks (and therefore the guidance) will vary depending on the type of residence in which the person is living.

It is important to note this guidance is referring to a variety of different settings so the management and clinical staff will clearly need to adapt to local circumstances and the residents' differing needs.

(The term Residential care facility is used as a generic term to encompass the wide range of facilities in which care is provided to older people, people with a disability, with Mental health issues and certain medical conditions.)

Following discussion at NPHET it is therefore proposed to allow a similar relaxation of the restriction on visiting for people who are cocooning in their own homes. Therefore it is proposed to:

- Allow for visits to homes of over 70s and those medically vulnerable,
- By no more than 1 person (from an agreed two persons) at one time for up to 30mins and
- Wearing face coverings, maintaining strict 2m social distancing, and where feasible, in well-ventilated spaces.

Draft guidance on visitations to Residential Care Facilities

Draft 4 24th May 2020

4.4.2 Family and friends.

As Residential Care Facilities are the home environments of individuals residing there, the importance of maintaining family connections with loved ones cannot be underestimated from a holistic person centred approach. As part of this person centred approach, timely communication in a manner appropriate to that resident will include an overview of the proposed visiting arrangements and any updates or changes that may occur in accordance with Public Health/ Infection control advice.

As per regulatory requirements, visiting is typically encouraged and welcomed in the normal daily functioning of these facilities. This document aims to provide guidance to management, staff, residents and relatives to facilitate visiting during these exceptional times, as visiting restrictions are very important in preventing accidental introduction of COVID-19 into an RCF

This document while providing guidance regarding operationalisation of these measures also seeks to respect the autonomy of the residents while also mitigating the risk of exposure to Covid-19.

Visits to Residential Care Facilities (RCFs) are at the discretion of the Registered Provider/ Person in Charge in management of each facility and it is their responsibility to ensure that visitations do not compromise overall resident care or adherence to requisite infection control procedures. Consultation with local Public Health teams and Infection Prevention and Control expertise will assist the Registered Provider/ Person in Charge in review of their plans and risk mitigation in order to facilitate visiting. Restrictions to visiting are aimed at protecting residents, staff and visitors from exposure to Covid-19.

All these measures will be in alignment with national guidance in relation to infection prevention and control, current and future guidance and recommendations with regard to social distancing and other public health measures, and in addition, current and future guidance specific to RCFs.

4.4.2.1 Visiting in a RCF with no ongoing COVID-19 outbreak

Indoor visiting for residents in RCFs where there is no ongoing COVID-19 outbreak is permissible in circumstances where the following criteria are followed:

- Each resident has a maximum of two named visitors. Only one of those visitors can be present at any one time and visits should be arranged in advance with the facility.
- Visits should be scheduled to avoid heavy footfall in the RCF at any time. It is expected that the facility will consider the number of visitors they can accommodate and to discuss these plans with IPC who can then seek PH advice if required.
- A separate entrance and exit area for visitors is to be encouraged.
- Visitors should be asked if they have had COVID- 19 or had close contact with a person with COVID-19 / suspected COVID-19 symptoms within the time period as determined by national guidance. Visitors should declare that they have no symptoms and undergo a temperature check before being permitted to enter the RCF.
- Visitors are required to sign in on entry to the facility (regulatory requirement). They should either use their own pen or be signed in.

- Unplanned visits shall not be facilitated. The Person in Charge /Designee will be notified of any difficulties encountered in implementation of this measure.
- Visitors should be guided in performing hand hygiene when they arrive.
- Visitors are required to wear a surgical mask if they are not able to maintain social distancing during the visit. This surgical mask will be provided by the facility and its disposal will be monitored. National guidance will be adhered to in application of the surgical mask.
- Visits should occur either in the resident's room if the room is a single room, or in the case of a multi-occupancy facility, a room away from other people or in an outdoor area (weather permitting) where distance can be maintained will be provided.
- Visits are limited to less than 30 minutes, with each visitor allowed a maximum of one visit per week. Visits should only take place during the day when the main cohort of staff are on duty and away from mealtimes with pre-arranged timings.
- No food/ refreshments are permitted. Use of the resident's/visitors' bathroom facilities is discouraged.
- Children under 16 are not permitted to visit.
- The resident's right to decline a visitor shall be respected.

4.4.2.2 Visiting during an outbreak of COVID-19

During an ongoing outbreak of COVID-19 within a RCF, family and friends should be advised that all but essential visiting (for example end of life) is suspended in the interest of protecting residents, visitors and staff at this time. (Refer to existing guidance on Care of the Dying Patient for visits at End of Life).

While visiting restrictions are very important in controlling an outbreak of COVID-19 in an RCF, there may be emergency circumstances in which it may still be appropriate for family or other relevant persons who are able to do so to provide some support to the care of a resident in an RCF (for example end of life). In such an event the following should be followed:

- Family and friends should be aware of the limited circumstances in which visiting is permitted.
- They should be informed that such essential visits are permitted only when arranged in advance with the facility's Person in Charge/ Registered Provider and they should be advised of the risks of personal transmission to them.
- They should be made aware of the visiting processes that apply which are symptom and temperature-checking, determination of previous known exposure to COVID -19, and use of correct hand-hygiene techniques.
- In addition, they should be made aware that any visitors with fever or respiratory symptoms will not be admitted. Visitors should declare that they have no symptoms and undergo a temperature check before being permitted to enter the RCF.
- Visitors should be asked if they have had COVID- 19 or had close contact with a person with COVID / suspected COVID symptoms (refer to current national Public Health guidance regarding timeline).
- Visitors are advised of the requirement for PPE to be worn as part of the visit and ensure appropriate assistance and guidance in relation to donning and doffing is given with same. Appropriate PPE will be provided by the RCF.
- Visitors should be guided in performing hand hygiene when they arrive.

- No food/ refreshments are permitted during the visit.

The messages around visiting during an outbreak should be reinforced by placing signage at all entry points to the facility and by any other practical means of communication with families and friends.