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Dear Colleagues

LATEST REVIEW OF “VISITING WITH CARE – A PATHWAY”

As required under the terms of the “**Visiting With Care – A Pathway**” guidance document, the Public Health Expert Reference Group within the Public Health Agency has recently completed its latest formal review of surveillance information around care home settings.

Review Outcome

Based on the analysis of the available surveillance information (see **Appendix 1** below) I can confirm that the Department has accepted the recommendation that visiting arrangements in Care Homes should now be facilitated within the parameters set out in the fourth and final full stage of the Pathway – “**Preparing for the Future**”. This will take effect from 1 July.

This is a very positive step in our efforts to return to normalised visiting arrangements, but comes with the following caveats:

- Care homes should carefully consider their local circumstances before stopping their visiting booking system taking into account the

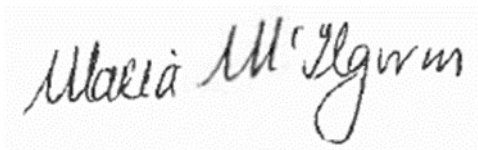
care home's staffing capacity, presence of cases of COVID-19 and ability to support safe visiting practice. Further information to support decision making will issue from the PHA shortly.

- While formal Care Partner arrangements may be scaled back to reflect easing of access restrictions, the scheme should remain in place in the event that they prove necessary or useful in certain circumstances, particularly during an outbreak situation.
- Care homes must ensure that they maintain strict adherence to all IPC measures, including enhanced cleaning, to help prevent the spread of infection.
- Care homes should remind visitors of their joint responsibility in keeping care home residents safe by adhering to the care home's IPC policy including hand sanitising and the wearing of face coverings. Visitors should also be advised that the PHA will continue to closely monitor the situation and may advise on increasing restrictions again, should relevant information sources and surveillance data indicate the need to do so.
- In the event of a confirmed COVID-19 outbreak care homes should continue to apply the PHA advice for visiting in an outbreak which came into effect on the 2 May 2022.

As intimated in the last update, we have updated the information leaflet which conveys the outcome of the latest review in an accessible way alongside other key messages around the safe facilitation of visiting as we move forward together; this is attached for your convenience and should be shared widely with residents and their families.

This is a hugely positive step forward for all in the care home sector, and our ability to make this step is in no small part due to your ongoing efforts, so once again I wish to thank you for the sterling work you all undertake daily to provide safe effective care for our care home residents.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Maria McIlgorm". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped 'M' at the beginning.

Maria McIlgorm
Chief Nursing Officer

cc: Trust Directors of Older People Services
Sean Holland
Dr Michael McBride
Dr Lourda Geoghegan
Tim Johnston
Debbie Murray
Geraldine Traynor
William Stewart
Janet Humphries
Pauline Shepherd – IHCP
Leslie-Anne Newton – ARC
Vivian McConvey - PCC
Sandra Aitcheson – PHA
Malachy Finnegan - RQIA

Summary of Public Health Expert Reference Group Findings:

Table 1. Summary of key indicators of COVID-19 prevalence and severity

Measure	Source	Most recent date	Value	Trend	Limitations
Care home outbreaks	PHA	6 June 2022	7-day rolling mean of ~1 new outbreak per day, but 4 new outbreaks were reported on 6 June	Increasing	
Estimated percentage of the population that would test positive for COVID-19	ONS Coronavirus (COVID-19) Infection Survey	Most recent report, ending 1 June 2022	1.33% of the population would have tested positive	Unchanged from previous week	Reporting time lag of ~2 weeks from study period
COVID-19 cases	PHA	5 June 2022 (by specimen date)	7-day rolling mean of at 359/day	Increasing	Affected by recent changes in testing.
Rate of reported COVID-19 cases by age group per 100,000 population	PHA	5 June 2022 (by specimen date)	81 cases in 7 days per 100,000 population for people aged 80+ in Northern Ireland	Increasing	Affected by recent changes in testing.
Emergency hospital admissions for community-acquired COVID-19	PHA	1 June 2022 (by admission date)	Fifteen emergency community-acquired COVID-19 per day	Increasing	Admissions reflect infections that occurred ~10 days earlier
COVID-19 related deaths in care homes	NISRA / General Registrar's office	Week ending 20 May 2022 (by date of death registration)	3 COVID-19-related deaths in care homes were registered in the most recent week (one of these had date of death during that week)	Remains low	Time lag for this indicator may be ~3-4 weeks from infection.