



Department of  
**Health**  
An Roinn Sláinte  
Máinnystrie O Poustie  
[www.health-ni.gov.uk](http://www.health-ni.gov.uk)

**Maria McIlgorm**  
*Chief Nursing Officer*

**Aine Morrison**  
*Chief Social Services Officer*

**Aidan Dawson**  
*Chief Executive, Public Health Agency*

C5.14  
Castle Buildings  
Stormont Estate  
BELFAST  
BT4 3SJ  
Tel: 028 90-520562

[maria.mcilgorm@health-ni.gov.uk](mailto:maria.mcilgorm@health-ni.gov.uk)

21 December 2022

Dear

## **VISITING IN CARE HOMES OVER THE CHRISTMAS PERIOD 2022**

As you will remember all too well, the priority of protecting residents from the impact of COVID-19 resulted in some significant restrictions to care home visiting over the past couple of years. Unfortunately, those restrictions were felt particularly severely over both Christmas periods, in 2020 and 2021.

We have learned a great deal since March 2020, and as society continues to learn to live with COVID-19, this learning was used to develop the “Visiting With Care – the New Normal” document which took effect from 1 September 2022. This guidance has been in place for a little over three months and we are pleased to note that the incidence of families raising concerns around visiting in care home settings has reduced to almost none, and this is a testament to the good work of staff and management across the sector.

Following the recent issue of an update to the recommended approach to managing visiting during an outbreak, the “Visiting With Care – the New Normal” document has been updated to reflect the removal of the requirement for whole home testing in such circumstances. The updated guidance is available [here](#).

As we approach the festive season, we would like to take this opportunity to recognise the importance of our care home residents being able to see family and friends at what for many is a very special time of the year. Therefore we would remind you of the key actions Care Homes should take to support visiting over the Christmas and New Year period.

The goal for us all remains to make sure that our care home residents can indeed enjoy the festive season in the company of family and friends just as they would have done prior to the pandemic. This means that:

- In normal circumstances there should be no restrictions placed on any resident to prevent them from being able to receive visitors or enjoy freedom to leave their care home on trips or excursions;
- Visiting can also still take place during an outbreak following a dynamic risk assessment and providing appropriate infection prevention and control procedures can be adhered to.
- If the care home has capacity, and visitors are aware of the ongoing situation and can give informed consent, there should be no restrictions on visiting. This could include visiting from Ministers of Faith, or access for hairdressers and other visiting professionals.
- Restrictions should only be introduced if absolutely necessary and there needs to be a clear rationale for doing so; the PHA Duty Room will provide advice at the time of any outbreak.

We enclose a letter to each of your residents confirming these arrangements and would ask that a copy is provided to all.

In closing, we would like to take this opportunity to thank you for all the care you have provided to residents this year and wish each of you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Yours sincerely



**MARIA McILGORM**  
Chief Nursing Officer



**AINE MORRISON**  
Chief Social Services Officer



**AIDAN DAWSON**  
Chief Executive, PHA