



Scottish Government
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Covid-19: Christmas and New Year guidance for Adult Care Homes and Visitors

4th December 2020

Introduction

Christmas and New Year are an important time for many residents and their loved ones. This guidance aims to reiterate existing national guidelines that **all** care homes should safely resume indoor visiting where recommended. Ideally, care homes should seek to achieve this for the coming festive period where that has not already been done. The guidance also sets out specific safeguards that care homes can put in place to support festive activities while continuing to manage transmission risk.

Balancing the serious risks posed by the virus to care home residents with the ability to see friends and family throughout any holiday period remains challenging.

However, recognising the beneficial effects of participating in festive events and ensuring that visiting can take place is crucial to the wellbeing of residents and their families and friends.

The UK-wide relaxation of restrictions between 23rd and 27th December does not apply to visiting people in care homes or residents. The safest way to spend Christmas and protect care home residents, if people want to visit someone in a care home, would be to stay within your own household and not form a bubble with any other household.

Visiting to adult care homes throughout the Christmas and New Year period remains linked to the local level of restrictions. For areas in **Level 4** only essential visits are recommended alongside window and garden visits, if Directors of Public Health judge this to be safe. In some exceptional circumstances indoor visiting may be permitted by the Director of Public Health following a risk assessment and discussion with the care home and local oversight team.

For those wishing to celebrate over the Christmas and New Year period (including relatives or loved ones), visiting and associated activities should be seen as **imperative**, and supported generously and sympathetically, whenever it is safe to do so. It is important that decisions are made carefully and proportionately, especially decisions that involve the protection of rights, such as the right to religious freedom and to a family life.

Part 1: Key points for visiting and celebrating the festive season

Advice for visiting family and friends

You can:

- Visit loved ones – if safe to do so, note existing national visiting recommendations continue
- Bring gifts into the care home, liaising with care homes first to arrange
- Travel into and out of Levels 3 and 4 to visit loved ones in care homes – this is exempt from the national restrictions
- Always have an essential visit if needed, no matter the stage in the pandemic
- Remember, the safest way to spend Christmas and protect care home residents, if people want to visit someone in a care home, would be to stay within your own household and not form a bubble with any other household.
- Change the designated visitor by discussing and arranging with the care home in advance.
- Best protect your loved ones by paying special attention to continuing with safe behaviours (remember FACTS) before and during your visit
- From 14th December, ask the care home about taking a test before your visit. They will tell you how to do this, either at the care home or at a nearby test centre. Testing is not compulsory but is strongly recommended and is in addition to existing safety measures such as wearing PPE
- Ask the care home about your loved one visiting for the day or overnight (if they are not resident in care homes for older adults), and how you and your household can mitigate the risks as far as possible in advance and on the visit.

Advice for care homes

You can:

- Support Christmas traditions and celebrations with Christmas trees, decorations etc., adopting a number of measures, which are outlined below, to mitigate any risks. Continue to maintain an up to date risk assessment
- Continue to support (or adopt) visiting in line with national guidance of 12th October including essential visits at all times
- Continue to generously support essential visits regardless of which Level of restrictions your care home is in
- Draw on support from oversight arrangements if you have any questions or concerns around how to implement a safe and balanced approach to visiting
- Plan with the resident's wishes being paramount, and communicate in advance with families
- Continue visiting, with or without visitor testing, because it is additional to existing infection prevention and control measures, rather than a replacement.
- Support residents in care homes **not** for older adults to leave the care home for day and overnight visits, with testing and self-isolation on return, if they and families wish
- Screen for symptom awareness before visits, and test designated visitors (where consent is in place) in line with local arrangements, alongside IPC and PPE and sharing of visitor contact details for test and protect.

Part 2: Christmas celebrations

Christmas trees and decorations

We know that care homes have a strong tradition of making Christmas special for their residents. Care homes can continue to do this and put up Christmas trees and decorations. To mitigate any risk associated with this, we recommend that:

- Christmas trees are preferably placed in an area where contact/touching is minimal. We recognise that it is not practical for Christmas trees and decorations to be cleaned in the same manner as other items in a care home.
- Consider the risk of regular resident touch and if appropriate arrange a discreet boundary around the tree.
- Decorations are chosen and sited to minimise touching and are non-edible. Placing of decorations should allow areas they are placed in to be cleaned.
- Where decorations are to be hung from the ceiling, no ceiling tiles should be moved to place them (in line with existing good practice for general infection prevention control).
- Decorations are as clutter free as possible.
- Hand hygiene procedures continue to be maintained.
- Normal surface cleaning and disinfection procedures apply, including where care homes have an outbreak.

Christmas Gifts

Christmas is also a time when gifts are traditionally exchanged. Residents should be supported to give and receive gifts. As a reminder, there are mitigations to doing this as safely as possible:

- Gifts are wiped clean on receipt by the care home (or quarantined for 72 hours in a sealed plastic bag).
- Home baking can be supported to be brought in, and should only be consumed by the resident who receives it (sharing food and utensils can be a source of transmission so should be avoided). There should also be the normal adherence to food hygiene precautions and regulations around bringing in food for residents.

Festive Characters

We know that many care home residents enjoy visits from Santa or other festive characters. Residents should still be able to participate in and enjoy these activities. But this year, we need you to make this as safe as possible. Our advice to do the below:

- The role of Santa – or any other festive character - is played by someone from the existing care home staff cohort. In line with existing staffing recommendations, there should be no movement of staff across different care homes or floors and this will need to be factored into your preparations.

- In line with existing guidance, anyone dressed as festive/holiday characters should avoid hugging residents, staff and visitors. Shaking hands can be supported as long as hand hygiene is performed between each contact.
- Characters avoid going from person to person to prevent transmission.
- Staff playing the role of Santa (and others) change into their outfit at the care home and do not travel into and out of the care home in 'costume'. Outfits are removed at end of the visit and washed at the highest possible temperature that the material can withstand, on their own, i.e. not with any other items in the same wash cycle. Otherwise (e.g. if not washable), the outfit or items of outfit should be quarantined for 72 hours between use.

Communal activities

Christmas and New Year are a time when people get together to celebrate and we are keen to ensure that residents can have an enjoyable time, whilst managing the risk of transmission.

Christmas lunch / shared meals should go ahead and care homes should plan ways to mitigate risks by organising different meals in staggered cohorts, and/or in socially distanced communal areas. Food should always be served on individual plates, especially where 'finger food' is being provided. Eating utensils should not be shared and by serving food in individual plates there is no need for serving utensils at the table.

Carol singing can take place and should always be outdoors where groups or individuals who are not part of the care home staff cohort are coming to sing, and physical distancing and symptom awareness should be maintained. Doors should be opened to assist hearing. Any performances should be planned and delivered in line with [guidance for performing arts](#).

Religious services should be supported and spiritual/faith and belief representatives or leaders should be encouraged to attend, as per existing guidance. **Attendance at worship outside the home should be supported electronically.**

All current Infection Prevention and Control and safety recommendations should be followed during communal activity, including hand hygiene, respiratory and cough hygiene – 'Catch it, bin it, kill it' - and physical distancing of 2 metres in all areas including non-clinical areas

Testing for care home visitors

The First Minister announced on 2 December that lateral flow tests will be provided to care homes from 14 December to enable care homes to begin to adopt testing for designated visitors. It is possible that not all homes will be able to make use of lateral flow tests available before Christmas, and so we are also planning to make PCR testing of visitors available over the festive period. Separate guidance will be provided alongside online workshops for care homes and to support roll-out.

Visiting is not dependent on testing, but visitors should be supportively encouraged to take a test because it provides additional protection for their loved one. This is an additional layer of protection to enhance existing safety protocols and practices and to provide additional confidence to care homes, staff, residents and visitors. If visitors do not wish to take a test you should explore the reasons for this, discuss the benefits, and support visiting in line with existing guidance after assessing the risks. Any visitors who test positive will not be admitted and will be redirected to Test and Protect support.

Person centred planning

To support this, care homes should:

- Work with local oversight arrangements to develop their visiting plan for the festive period, including particular attention to key days and any need for measures such as additional staffing, staggering visitors and staff breaks.
- Engage early with residents and their loved ones/representatives to identify the level and nature of desired visiting in advance, as well as local visiting policy if Level 4 is put in place during the festive period.
- Be flexible to requests to change designated visitors.
- Undertake contingency planning with local oversight arrangements to agree local visiting policy in the event that their area moves to Level 4 over the Christmas or New Year period.
- Always support essential visits, including in Level 4.

Supporting residents to visit outside the care home (only care homes not registered as for older adult)

Where residents and their families in care homes **not** for older adults wish to leave for day or overnight visits, in addition to existing advice and health protection liaison where needed, the following mitigating actions should be considered:

- Assess individual needs and risks.
- Facilitate only one bubble with the household that residents will visit (not three).
- Ask residents and others in the household they're visiting to take steps to minimise risk and prevent infection, recognising the risk of infection to everyone in the care home when the resident returns.
- This includes maintaining social distance; washing hands regularly, letting plenty of fresh air into rooms (opening windows and doors) and ideally limiting the number of people they meet for two weeks prior to a care home resident coming into their household to minimise their potential exposure to the virus.

Useful Links

A range of other guidance documents are available to support celebrating and visiting over Christmas and New Year. These are listed below.

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): adult care homes guidance](#)

(or via: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-adult-care-homes-visiting-guidance/>)

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): local protection levels](#)

(or via: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-protection-levels/>)

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): guidance on travel and transport](#)

(or via: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-travel-and-transport/#exceptions>)

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): guidance for the performing arts and venues sector](#)

(or via: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-the-performing-arts-and-venues-sector/pages/people-involved-in-performing-producing-designing-and-supporting-events/#Playing%20music>)