

Introduction

This policy revises the arrangements for visiting Sharob Care's homes from 16th December 2021 (updated from 25th November 2021), in line with the latest government guidance, which integrates previously separate guidance for making visits to the home and out of the home, respectively.

The key messages included in the include the following.

- **Essential care givers** — Every resident is entitled to have an essential care giver, who can visit as frequently and regularly as needed. The essential care giver must follow the same testing arrangements as the home colleagues, and when providing direct personal care, must follow the same PPE and infection control arrangements as care home colleagues. (However, an essential care giver is not subject to the mandatory vaccination requirement as are paid colleagues.)
- **End-of-life visits** — Sharob Care will be flexible when considering requests for people to visit a resident who is approaching the need for, or receiving end-of-life care. Visitors should use lateral flow tests in line with the home's testing arrangements for visiting. (See section on Essential Purpose Visiting.)
- **Professional visits** — Sharob Care will facilitate necessary visiting by health, social care and other professionals. We will ensure visiting professionals meet the mandatory vaccination requirements, where applicable, and follow agreed testing, IPC and PPE measures.
- **Infection prevention and control** — Sharob Care will manage our visiting arrangements in relation to the risks from Covid-19 and other infections such as flu by adhering to standard infection prevention and control practices.
- **Risk assessments** — Sharob Care will assess the risks and benefits of visits for each person and develop a suitable visiting plan that provides the benefits in a risk controlled way. (Risks include those to others as well as the individual.)
- **Testing arrangements** — Sharob Care have a testing regime in place that enables safe visiting to take place, which can be adapted to changing needs.
- **Visits out of the care home** — Sharob Care will support residents to take part in visits out of the care home, whether for a short walk or for a longer visit, including an overnight stay with family and friends. (See separate 'Out of Home' Visiting Policy.)
- **Communicating with families and visitors** — Sharob Care will provide clear advice and instructions to enable safe visiting to take place.
- **Care home outbreaks** — Sharob Care will take all necessary steps to control any outbreak of infectious illnesses in line with its infection prevention and control policy, which will usually have an impact on its visiting arrangements. With Covid, our homes can now, re-open our doors to visiting after 7–8 days (instead of 14 days) after an all clear (as determined by negative testing).
- **Working with public health and adult social services** — Sharob Care expects local authorities to support its visiting policies assuming that they enable safe visiting to take place. The authorities should only

recommend a more restrictive approach it is needed on public health grounds and then only for as long as necessary.

Definitions

Sharob Care uses the same definition of “visitor” as in its main policy, i.e. someone who does not live or normally work on the premises as a paid colleagues member or accredited volunteer and who comes to the home for a short period of time to see residents or colleagues.

For the purposes of this policy visitors include people who:

- visit residents on a personal or social basis regularly or occasionally, e.g. relatives, friends and others who come to see an individual resident
- provide professional services to residents such as GPs, community nurses, pharmacists, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, ministers of religion, social workers, advocates, hairdressers, opticians, etc. Sharob Care requires all these types of visitors to be fully vaccinated before they come onto the care home in line with its mandatory vaccination policy and the new regulations.
- deliver, provide or supply goods and services that have been bought or commissioned by the home, colleagues or residents, including repairs and maintenance; these might also be subject to the mandatory vaccination requirement if their work requires entry into our care homes.
- come to the home to see colleagues for any reason - they might also be subject to the mandatory vaccination requirement to obtain entry into the care home.
- visit the home on a professional or business basis, e.g. external managers, inspectors and other personnel from Sharob Care or similar who may not be coming specifically to see individual residents, but who may have some contact with them depending on the nature and purpose of their visit; who are also subject to the mandatory vaccination requirement to obtain entry into the care home.

This policy applies mainly to relatives and friends of residents and others who might need to have direct contact with residents. With other visitors, the home will continue to apply all required infection control measures, including health and safety risk assessments, the appropriate use of PPE and regular testing. In these ways the home is committed to minimising and mitigating the risks of infection into, through and from the home. Sharob Care has a separate a separate ‘Out of Home’ Visiting Policy.

Policy Statement

Sharob Care’s visiting policy will always be adapted to the changing conditions concerning the spread of Covid-19 and the associated Government policies and guidance. The current policy reflects Government guidance with effect from 16th December 2021, which has been updated from that on 25 November 2021 because of increasing transmission rates and risk of infection.

Sharob Care understands that any longer-term continuation of these arrangements will depend on how well the pandemic is being brought under control and the continuing effectiveness of the vaccination programme, which includes the mandatory vaccination for care colleagues and others who seek to enter the care home.

The home welcomes the Government’s current position, which recognises that visiting is:

- a central part of care home life
- crucial for maintaining the health, wellbeing and quality of life of residents

- vital for family and friends to maintain contact and lifelong relationships with their loved ones and to contribute to their support and care.

Sharob Care accepts the need for restrictions on the number of visitors, which are **three** from 16th December 2021 because of the increasing transmission rates and recognises that visiting must be made safe to all concerned. We continue to apply our infection control measures fully in line with this latest Government and public health guidance.

We acknowledge that, despite the vaccination roll out and its evident effectiveness, care home residents are still at risk by virtue of their age and frailty to being seriously and possibly fatally ill if they fall ill with Covid-19.

Sharob Care is committed to making its visiting policy available and well communicated to its residents and families, so that they understand fully the reasons for any restrictions and arrangements and changes that might need to be made in line with local and national developments regarding Covid-19.

Approaches Taken During Restrictions

Sharob Care recognises that the guidance on visiting has been issued in stages in line with the severity of the threat caused by the Covid-19 outbreak. The continuing thread is that there still cannot be any regular open visiting for care home residents as stated in its usual Visiting and Visitors' Policy, which is in abeyance until the current national restrictions to control the spread of Covid-19 are lifted.

During this period our homes have arranged for suitable alternative means of relatives and others who would normally be visiting for keeping in contact with residents and the home through, for example, telephone, messaging, social media, Facetime, Skype and Zoom. These methods are well established and will continue as options even after the lifting of the current visiting restrictions.

During the course of the pandemic our homes have made use of different models as described by the Care Provider Alliance Visitors Protocol (February 2021), e.g. window and garden, the use of pods, lodges and gazebos, and some indoor visiting arrangements using safe, dedicated areas. Our homes have used, and could continue to use, these alternative approaches depending on new variants of concern and local outbreaks.

Sharob Care will continue to use these alternative approaches if the circumstances require them or it assists the residents to receive their visitors in safe, relaxing surroundings.

Visiting Policy Principles (16th December 2021)

With any set of arrangements, our homes will continue to have in place, or be ready to put in place all essential safety measures to:

- keep safe physical distances between people in line with Government guidance
- ensure high quality infection prevention and control practices before, during and after each visit
- ensure any number of people visiting in line with the home's policy can do so safely
- have entry and exit arrangements for visitors that minimise risks of possible cross-infection
- ensure good ventilation in every visiting area
- supervise the arrangements to ensure all safety precautions are being followed
- continue to assess and manage all risks.

Revised Visiting Policy

In developing its policy, Sharob Care continues to adopt the current Government guidance (with effect from 16th December 2021).

Sharob Care welcomes the recognition that visits should be supported and enabled wherever it is safe to do so.

We accept that we are responsible for setting our own visiting policy and arrangements in line with national and local public health guidance.

We will take a risk assessment and management approach taking into consideration the needs of individuals within their home and with regard to the advice of the local Director of Public Health (DPH) through their outbreak management team or group.

- continue the policy of “essential care givers” (as defined in government guidance) where in exceptional circumstances close contact personal care can be provided from a close relative/person who is critical for the resident’s immediate health and wellbeing (not only to end-of-life care). The “essential care givers” will be supported to follow the same testing arrangements and the same PPE and infection control arrangements as care home colleagues.
- allow “indoor” visits by three named visitors to pre-appointed areas and at pre-appointed times that can be supported by prior LFD testing and visitors who have been vaccinated against Covid-19 (recommended in the government guidance).
- revise where appropriate its policy of “outdoor” visits adapted to the situation and weather as indicated by the risk assessments and information on community transmission rates, including those made using temporary facilities such as pods and gazebos, window visits and drive-throughs and its use of technology to facilitate contact between residents and their families and friends.
- continue with our current position of taking a flexible approach to visiting required on compassionate grounds where a resident is receiving end-of-life care, following government guidance on suitable testing arrangements.

Sharob Care will ensure that all visits are conducted in a risk-managed way that considers the needs of our service users and the practicalities arising from the physical features and layout of the home.

We will continue to assess the rights and needs of individual residents, particularly those with specific vulnerabilities as outlined in their care plans and will consider the importance of visits in promoting their health and wellbeing.

Residents will be fully involved in naming and receiving their visitors (as set out in the updated government guidance applying from 16th December 2021) and the arrangements for their visits.

We will continue to make appropriate best interest decisions with the help of all involved in their care in respect of residents who lack mental capacity and who might be subject to deprivation of liberty authorisations and involving them as fully as possible.

We will follow all Government and local public health guidance in respect of the arrangements needed to ensure safe visiting of residents whenever this takes place. We will always ensure safety is never compromised and will adopt Government and local public health advice on any form of visiting. In this respect we understand that

fully vaccinated residents do not need to isolate if they have been identified as a close contact of someone who has tested positive for Covid-19 and therefore can continue to receive visits on a risk managed basis.

Implementation

Sharob Care recognises that our current visiting policy and arrangements will be subject to local circumstances and will have to be adjusted to meet any changes in these. These changes include:

- the circumstances of Sharob Care in terms of its location, resident needs, current staffing situation and its experiences with the Covid-19 outbreak
- the local circumstances of the Covid-19 epidemic, including past and current incidence and transmission risks, and the prevalence of SARS CoV-2 variants.

Any arrangements made by our homes will apply only when safe to do so, with the approval of the local Public Health authority and on the basis its “dynamic risk assessment”.

Our decisions will continue to be based on balancing the benefits to our residents (and reducing harm because of lack of visits) against the risks of increasing Covid-19 infections and their consequences to a vulnerable group of people.

We recognise that decisions to allow visiting and under what circumstances will be made in line with local intelligence from testing on the community and of residents and colleagues, transmission risks in the local community, including from SARS-CoV-2 variants, and other information provided by the home, for example, through its Capacity Tracker updating.

When setting up any new indoor visiting arrangements, we will ensure that they can be accessed and used safely without risk to and from the other parts of the home. Any such arrangement will follow all public health guidance on:

- a safe number of visitors that can be allowed at any one time or over a period of time
- how our homes should support visitors to reduce the risks of their transmitting any infectivity to our homes and of being infected from their visits to Sharob Care, including prior testing, the wearing of face coverings, hand hygiene, etc
- the infection control measures required for the use of the visiting area, including the wearing of face-coverings and for access and exit
- the infection control measures to be taken by colleagues during visiting, including appropriate use of PPE.

Visiting Procedures, including Testing

While testing procedures are required, our homes will carry out the following:

- allow the number of visitors at any time that are in line with Government and local public health guidance and will ensure they are tested on each visit and/or have been vaccinated
- ensure visitors can provide evidence of a negative Lateral Flow Test prior to admittance and are wearing the appropriate PPE and following standard infection control measures such as hand hygiene
- have a designated entrance or outside dry space for people to put on the necessary personal protective equipment (PPE)

- ensure the designated area is well ventilated and complies with fire safety and other health and safety regulations and is robust enough to withstand repeated cleaning with chlorine-based agents
- ensure all physical distancing, face covering and hand hygiene requirements are followed, with hand sanitisers being readily available
- ensure all prospective visitors are made well aware of the requirement to be tested
- advise them of what would happen if they tested positive ie the visit would not go ahead, they would need a confirmatory PCR test, which Sharob Care would carry out. If that was also positive they would need to follow Government guidance on self-isolating with other members of their households and the information fed into NHS test and trace
- have a designated visiting area that does not increase any risk to anyone else in the home and to which all safety measures can be applied.

Testing Arrangements for Essential Care Givers

The home will follow all Government guidance in relation to visitors defined as “essential care givers” as follows.

Visitors who might be engaged in personal care and support as designated “essential care-givers” will be required:

- to take a weekly PCR test and share the result with the home colleagues. In line with government guidance, Sharob Care will use its existing PCR stocks to test essential care givers and administer them as with other staff tests. They will be registered as “staff” tests using the care home unique organisation number (UON) and be returned via courier with other staff tests
- to take a minimum of two lateral flow tests a week: one lateral flow test on the same day as a PCR test and one lateral flow test 3–4 days later and administer them following government guidance (rapid lateral flow tests can be done onsite, at an asymptomatic testing site (ATS) or at home, and the tests should be reported as “visitor” using the care home UON)
- with care home colleagues, be subject to additional testing should the care home be engaged in rapid response daily testing or outbreak testing
- to make arrangements with the care home for weekly PCR test and a lateral flow test on the day of their visit if the visitor is visiting less than twice a week
- to carry out additional testing in line with care home colleagues should the care home be engaged in rapid response daily testing or outbreak testing.

Other Testing Arrangements

Visitors who have recently tested positive for Covid-19 should not be retested within 90 days unless they develop new symptoms. This means that some visitors will not need to be tested regularly because they will still fall into this 90-day window. These visitors should use the result of a positive PCR result to show that they are currently exempt from testing until the 90-day period is over.

Once the 90-day period is over, visitors should then continue to be tested. They should still continue to follow all other relevant IPC measures throughout these 90 days, including maintaining good hand hygiene and wearing PPE.

Face Coverings and Physical Distancing

Sharob Care will follow current Government guidance and recommendations about the use of face coverings to reduce risks when people meet in enclosed public spaces and will require, subject to the risk factors present, visitors to wear face coverings and continue to maintain a safe physical distance.

Sharob Care, in consultation with its public health partners will always exercise discretion in instances where on the one hand residents are frightened or affected adversely by having to or seeing their visitors in face coverings and on the other hand, visitors have reasonable grounds for not wearing them, which can be discussed at pre-visiting planning.

Visits where face coverings are not worn will only be agreed where all parties are fully vaccinated and supported by negative LFD testing. In these circumstances, all parties will be reminded of the importance of maintaining safe physical distancing and hand hygiene procedures, (which apply to everyone at all times).

Visiting Schedules

Under the present circumstances the home recognises that all visits will have to be pre-booked and with limited availability some order of priority might need to be established.

It will base its priorities on the following.

- The importance to the wellbeing of the individual to have a resumption or continuation of visits and their expressed wishes.
- The degree of harm that might occur without any visits.
- The risk factors that are involved including the vulnerability to infection for the person concerned.
- The degree of compassion that is involved, eg if the person is receiving end of life care or is likely to be receiving it in the near future.
- The importance of visiting to the person in the context of their overall care plans.
- The effectiveness of the current contact or visiting arrangements in place.
- The willingness of prospective visitors to go through the new testing procedures if and when adopted by the home.

Sharob Care will ensure that the visiting arrangements will be planned, including times, frequency, and duration, and agreed in consultation with residents and their families and with professionals involved in a person's welfare.

Each resident will have a visiting plan, which will set out the arrangements for that individual together with an agreement outlining people's responsibilities for the safe and successful conduct of the arranged visits.

All visitors will be asked to provide separately, using the slips or electronic tools available, their contact details in addition to the usual signing of the visitors' book, which is required on other grounds, in line with the Government's test and trace guidance. This information will be held for 21 days after each visit before being destroyed in line with data protection laws.

Communicating with Residents, Families and Visitors

Sharob Care will follow Government guidance in respect of enabling visits to be conducted safely and successfully, including supporting visitors on how to prepare for a visit, including where testing is being used, and taking everyone's vaccination status into account.

The home accepts that the arrangements for each set of visits will vary and need to be highly individualised.

Mental Capacity

In making these arrangements Sharob Care will observe the rights of residents who may lack the relevant mental capacity needed to make particular decisions about their needs for visits and visiting plans. We will make all such arrangements in line with individual needs by following best interests decision — making as set out in the mental capacity laws, and where appropriate in consultation with their advocates or those with power of attorney.

However, we also recognise that people with dementia or without mental capacity for other reasons might also be the ones who will benefit most by the new visiting supported by testing approach from the closer contact that will be possible, and their needs given high priority.

Essential Purpose Visiting

Sharob Care considers that it is still important to maintain its essential visiting policy on in-home visits but with a flexible approach in line with Government guidance on visiting on compassionate grounds. If you must visit outside of the regular visiting arrangements for an essential purpose such as being with someone who is receiving end of life care we still ask you to check with the home beforehand to discuss the essential nature of the visit, its advisability and the safety issues in respect of residents and colleagues that should be addressed.

The home will encourage all visitors to take advantage of local SARS-CoV-2 testing facilities to provide reassurance that they are safe to visit, and the rapid testing arrangements that are being introduced.

Visitors' Risk Assessments

When visiting our care home as an agreed “essential or named visitor” we will still ask you to:

- check with us before visiting that everything is in order and that you do not have any symptoms for Covid-19
- check if you might have had any contact with anyone who might have been in contact with an infected person or someone carrying the virus and take a decision about visiting based on your assessment of any risks
- sign a short disclaimer to this effect
- be careful about being in physical contact with the person you are visiting and other people whom you might meet
- carry out good hand hygiene practice by washing your hands carefully before and after any contacts made — using the soap and hand sanitiser gels and paper towels provided
- help colleagues to carry out the procedures that have been put in place to keep everyone safe from the virus and its spread
- report and discuss with us any concerns you have about the health of the person whose welfare is your concern.

We are confident that with these precautions in place we will be able to keep our residents safe.

Coronavirus (Covid-19) Visiting Policy

Sharob Care will continue to update this visiting policy in the light of further developments, particularly if there are further cases of Covid-19 in the home or evidence of increased risk from community transmission that has been identified by local Public Health.

Colleagues Involvement and Training

All colleagues are made aware of the policy and of the changes made over time. They are also consulted in respect of individual risk assessments, decisions and arrangements, the new rapid testing approach and local test and trace programmes.

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