

Important Note on Normalising Visiting while Managing the Risk of COVID-19 in Long-Term Residential Care Facilities (LTRCFs)

Dear Relatives and Friends,

Residents in nursing homes and other residential care facilities have a right to maintain meaningful relationships with people who are important to them. Visiting is an essential part of that right.

The vaccination rollout in nursing homes has greatly reduced the risk of severe disease and death due to COVID-19 in this setting. On January 21st the Government announced a significant easing of restrictions on social activity reflecting a positive assessment of the current status of the pandemic.

In that context, it is appropriate to make additional progress towards normal visiting rights while recognising that there is a continuing level of risk and uncertainty.

New guidance will be implemented on February 8th 2022. This guidance states that in addition to other visitors, every resident should have an opportunity to identify one nominated support person.

The nominated support person should normally have unrestricted access to the resident for most of the day. At a minimum, the nominated support person will have access from mid-morning to late evening unless personal care is being delivered. The nominated support person will be seen as a partner in care.

Restrictions on the nominated support person will only be limited if:

- 1) The nominated support person is subject to self-isolation or restricted movement or otherwise represents an infection risk to staff or residents.
- 2) There is a written recommendation from a public health or infection prevention and control practitioner to limit access for nominated support people for a defined period in a specific context.

In addition to the nominated support person there is no requirement to limit the total number of different people who can visit a resident, however, only 2 people can visit at any one time in addition to the nominated support person.

However, the following has not changed:

1. A check for symptoms of COVID-19.
2. A check if they have been advised to self-isolate or restrict their movements for any reason.
3. Visitors are required to check in on entry to the centre.
4. Visitors will be guided in performing hand hygiene.
5. Visitors are required to wear a surgical mask.
6. Visitors are not required to wear a mask when they are alone with the person they are visiting.
7. If the resident is not in a single room, visitors may visit in this room but should be asked to stay in the space assigned to the person they are visiting.
8. The duration of the visit should not be limited.
9. Visitors should not interact with other residents and/or visitors.
10. Visits by children will be facilitated if accompanied by an adult.
11. Occasional visitors are advised to consider self-testing for COVID 19 using antigen tests for COVID 19. Regular visitors are advised to consider self-testing for COVID 19 twice weekly even when they have no symptoms.
12. Visitors should not visit if they have any symptoms including headache, runny nose, flu-like symptoms or aches and pains.

In critical and compassionate circumstances, visiting will be very flexible.

Yours sincerely,

Seamus McCaul,

Director of Nursing.