

Guidance on Visiting Inpatient Units during the COVID 19 Pandemic: update May 2021

On May 17th 2021, the government detailed a partial relaxation of COVID-19 restrictions, many of which had been in place since early 2020. A number of the rules preventing mixing between households now no longer apply within limited numbers. Such relaxations are not yet reflected in national guidance for NHS hospital settings and therefore a number of limitations are still in place.

This guidance sets out the principles of the [current NHSE visiting guidance](#). As with previous versions, local adaptation within services may be applied providing that each of the key principles is followed and frequently asked questions are answered in appendix 1 to assist with this. Visiting in line with the principles set out below will be reviewed as necessary where there is an increased incidence of infection or other instances where continuing with these principles poses a risk to staff or patient safety. Content is subject to change as guidance becomes available from public health bodies.

Exceptions

In exceptional circumstances flexibility will be considered on an individual basis following a risk assessment, including risk of infection, made by the MDT. An example of this is when a patient is receiving care at the end of life. Any exceptions agreed should follow appropriate infection control principles including the wearing of PPE, and be detailed in the patient's care plan. Visitors should be informed about the procedure for bringing items for patients onto the unit. Exceptions should be agreed with the Head of Operations and Infection Control Team Mon-Sun 9am-9pm and the on call CSM outside of those hours if the decision requires urgent approval.

Separate guidance is available to support visiting professionals.

Maintaining contact with families and carers where face to face visiting cannot occur

We recognise the importance to patients of maintaining contact with their family, friends and carers whilst they are in hospital. Where direct visiting is not possible, staff should facilitate other means of communicating, such as telephone and video calls and texting and all wards should now have the technology to enable this. Upon admission staff should agree with patients and carers the preferred methods of contact and ensure this is care planned. We have also set up an email address for families and friends to send messages to their loved ones whilst they are in our care. (letterstolovedones.lypft@nhs.net)

Written information is available for families and carers in Appendix 3.

Guiding principles

1. Visiting is limited to one close family contact or somebody important to the patient. Where support for the visitor is needed, e.g. to assist their communication or care needs, one other person may attend providing the family or support bubble can be maintained.
2. Lateral flow testing should be used by all visitors on the day of visit prior to attending the Trust, and a negative result should be verbally confirmed as part of the pre-visitation checks (principle 5). These tests are now widely available to the public free of charge <https://maps.test-and-trace.nhs.uk/>. Each ward should have a box of tests available to prevent visitors being turned away (see also FAQs in appendix 1 and process flow chart in appendix 2).
3. Wherever possible visiting should occur in an area off the main ward environment in a well ventilated space. This may be an allocated office or room. Any agreed local protocol must support a coordinated approach between all wards using this area, and this must include a clear process for cleaning in-between each visit.
4. Where it is not possible for the patient to leave the ward, visiting in an agreed designated area of the ward is permitted following an assessment of risk by the MDT.
5. All visiting must be booked in advance. Contact with the ward must be made to discuss local arrangements and provide information about what to expect on arrival; this conversation should include confirmation that the visitor will complete lateral flow testing on the day of visiting and only attend if they receive a negative result. A record of all visitors including the details below must be kept by the ward and stored confidentially:
 - Date and time
 - Patient being visited
 - Contact details for the purpose of contact tracing
 - Confirmation of declaration by the visitor that a lateral flow test has been completed on the day of visiting and negative result received
6. It is essential that current government guidance relating to self-isolation, shielding and social distancing is followed. If any visitor displays symptoms of coronavirus they should be asked to leave, self-isolate at home for 10 days and organise a test; members of their household should also self-isolate for 10 days.
7. Upon attending the ward or visiting area, staff must advise visitors about social distancing from other patients on site, and ensure visitors complete the following:
 - Hand hygiene
 - Put on PPE required for the type of visit
 - For ward visit mask, gloves, apron, visor will be worn
 - For visit in designated off ward area mask will be worn
 - Remove PPE safely and dispose appropriately at the end of the visit
 - Hand hygiene before leaving the area

Frequently Asked Questions

1. The guiding principles refer to one visitor. Does this mean just one relative can ever visit, or one at a time?

A local assessment must be made based on the individual family's needs, and needs to be agreed and confirmed with the family. It remains important to minimise the total number of people coming onto the hospital site at any one time. Consideration should be given to elderly visitors or those with additional needs who may require the support of another family member. In exceptional circumstances, this may lead to staff agreeing to 2 visitors at the same time. The total number of relatives that attend in rotation should be agreed in advance and advice is to limit these to a maximum 'pool' of 4 to reduce staff and patient exposure to a wider group of people.

2. The guidance requires that visitors complete lateral flow testing on the day of visit; do I have to see the result before allowing visiting to take place?

No, but visitors must declare that they have completed a test and received a negative result when they attend; and therefore they need to be informed of this when making contact to plan the visit. Where a visitor declines to confirm this, or states that they will not comply with this requirement, they will not be able to enter the premises unless they are willing to undertake an on the spot test provided by the ward. A supply of kits for this purpose can be obtained by emailing lateral.testing@nhs.net. Instructions for use can be found here <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/instructions-for-covid-19-self-test>. Please be aware that some people may need assistance with completing this.

3. How long can visitors stay?

This needs to be discussed and agreed with the ward team. It will be somewhat dependant on space available to accommodate booked visits. When a patient is close to the end of their life, a visitor should be permitted to remain with the patient and this can be rotated through the restricted number of visitors as described above.

4. What do we do if the patient has, or has recently had COVID 19?

Providing the isolation period of 14 days has been completed and there is no fever present, visiting may go ahead. The infection control team can be contacted for further advice if needed.

5. Are the chaplaincy team included in the numbers of visitors allowed?

No, the chaplaincy team are Trust employees and should not have any restrictions to their visits. They are aware of precautions required and the need to only attend ward areas when essential. Separate guidance is available for other visiting professionals such as advocacy services.

6. Can community faith leaders visit the patient?

Community faith leaders should not be attending the ward to visit patients unless they are among a person's designated visitors. Where there is a special request from family members there should be a discussion with the Trust's chaplaincy team to see if alternative arrangements can be provided.

7. What do we do if visitors refuse to comply with the agreed plan?

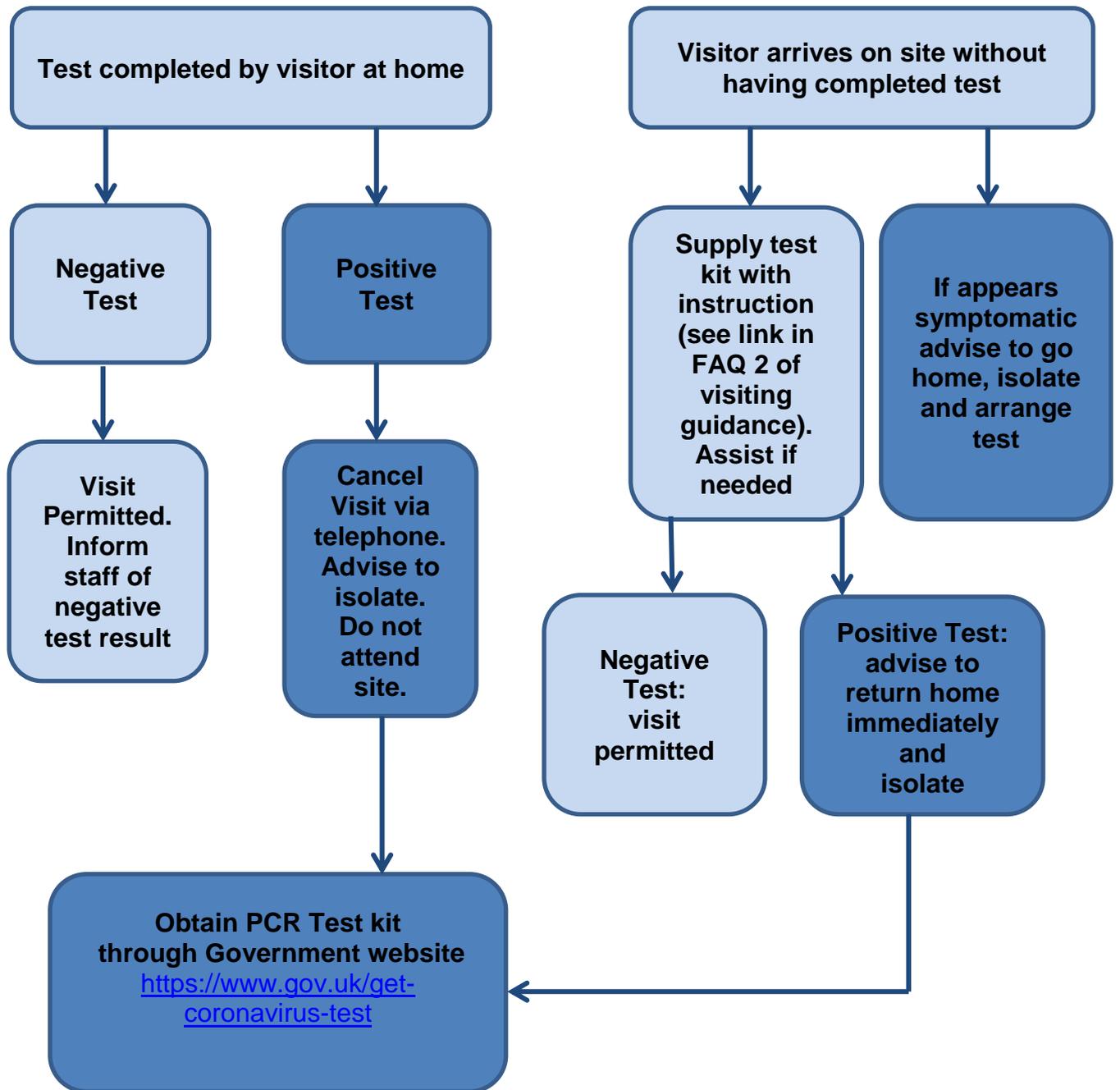
Where visitors refuse to adhere to this guidance and the agreed plan, staff should seek support from their Matron or Operational Manager. Discussions should take place with visitors about the risk to staff and other patients of non-compliance. Staff should ensure they have listened to the family and that local resolution /negotiation has been attempted. A warning of the withdrawal of any visiting should be made if non-compliance continues.

8. Are there any other steps we can put in place to support relatives at this difficult time?

Please consider making a clear plan to provide regular updates on the patient's condition via phone for relatives who are unable to attend the ward. Families should be asked to set up their own cascade system so that only 1 call from the ward is required and the possibility of set times for these calls could be agreed in advance. Relatives may appreciate talking to patients via speaker phone or using Whatsapp or Zoom/Skype where this facility is available.

The Trust Patient Advice and Liaison Team are available Monday to Thursday 8-4 and Friday 8-1 and can be contacted on 0800 052 5790.

Process for Lateral Flow Testing for Visiting



Appendix 3

Information about Visiting for Families and Carers during the COVID 19 Pandemic

We recognise how important it is for family and friends to keep in contact with each other particularly when someone is hospital but we have to carefully balance this with the risk and spread of infection. Therefore visiting remains limited at this time in line with NHS and Public Health England advice.

We understand how difficult and distressing this must be for you and your family or friend therefore we there are alternative options available for you to keep in touch if you are unable to visit. A member of the ward team will contact you on or immediately after admission to confirm how you can do this and be involved in their care where they have given you consent to do so.

We have Wi-Fi within our units which can facilitate video calls. If your family member or friend does not have access to a phone or laptop the ward staff are able to arrange this. We have also set up an email address for families and friends to send messages to their loved ones whilst they are in our care.

Letters to Loved Ones

We recognise that it is a very difficult for our patients and their families whilst visiting is limited. Not being able to talk to loved ones during this time is very distressing. In addition to the use of web platforms such as zoom, we have set up an email address, for families and friends to send messages to their loved ones whilst they are in our care.

Emails can be sent to letterstolovedones.lypft@nhs.net where the Complaints Team will print them, pop them in an envelope and deliver them for you. To make sure we deliver to the correct person please include the patients full name, date of birth or address, the site they are on e.g. The Mount, and the ward (if known) and any other special requirements (e.g. large print / letter to be read out).



Letters to loved ones will be delivered by the next working day.

Please note we are only able to offer this service Monday-Friday, any letters sent after 2pm on Friday will be delivered on the following Monday.

If you do not have access to an email our PALS team would be happy to write your message down on a card and we will print and deliver this in the same way. PALS can be contacted on Tel: 0800 0525 790.

If you would like to be involved in ward meetings please let staff know and we will tell you how to do this or if you prefer you can inform the ward team of things you wish to address and they will update you after.

In some cases our patients ask that we do not share information with family and friends. We know that this can be very frustrating and difficult but we can still give general information about the ward and processes and offer support to you.

We ask that items are not dropped off for patients on our units due to the potential infection control risk. Our staff can go to the shop for essential items if necessary. If any of our patients need anything brought in from home we will contact you and discuss this.

We know that caring for someone can be very stressful and even more so at this current time, but there is support available. Please speak to the ward team who would be happy to provide you with information about carers support within both our Trust and wider support from Carers Leeds.

We will regularly review our visiting arrangements in light of any changes in the national guidance.

If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact the ward and please look after yourselves.