

Visits to services – Covid19 guidance for Children's services

Visits by parents/carers, management and professionals including regulator(s)

This guidance should be read in conjunction with the government guidance in relation to national and local restrictions for England ([here](#)), Scotland ([here](#)) and Wales ([here](#)).

There is also an internal guidance: *Visits to services – Covid19 guidance for Visitors, Visitor's Risk Assessments and Social Distancing guidance for children's services*.

The health, safety and wellbeing of our young people, communities and teams across the organisation remains our absolute priority. Therefore decisions about visits should be based on the Visitor's Risk Assessment. The Visitor's Risk Assessment should take into consideration any local or national restrictions which apply to the area in which the service (school/colleges/home) is located. The consideration should include area which the visitors are travelling from.

The Visitor's Risk Assessment applies to all visitors.

There is currently a 3 tier system in place across England: Tier 1- [Medium](#), Tier 2- [High Risk](#), Tier 3- [Very High Risk](#). When you click on the level of risk level, this will take you to the government guidance about what each of the levels means in practice. More information about Local COVID alert levels including why the government is introducing local Covid alert levels can be found [here](#).

Summary of Covid alert levels:

- **In Medium areas (Tier 1)**, Visits remain in Gardens/Outside, people to follow social distancing rules
- **In High alert area (Tier 2)**, people must not socialise with anybody outside of their household or support bubble in any **indoor** setting, whether at home or in a public place. Remember that the area being visited will form part of any assessment.
- **In Very High COVID alert areas (Tier 3)**, people must not socialise with anybody they do not live with or have formed a support bubble with, in any **indoor setting or in any private garden**. No visits in services or family home visits will be possible except in the exceptional circumstances. Exceptional circumstances may be different for different people, hence this is an area to be explored with the family, Young person involved and their social worker.

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The guidance applies to England (see guidance for [Wales](#), [Scotland](#)). Wales is preparing to go into a national lockdown from Friday 23rd October until Monday, 9 November, more information will be added soon.

All visits to our services should continue being announced.

Where the Visitor's Risk Assessment allows, contact with parents (or guardians, whoever is acting in the parental role) can be maintained. Depending on the level of risk the visit may need to take place in the garden/outside. Managers will need to establish a rota of family/those with parental responsibilities visits – which should be scheduled in advance and where possible one at a time.

Where the Visitor's Risk Assessment allows, professional visits to the home can go ahead. This may include visits from Social Workers and other LA Professionals. Also, face to face Independent Person visit should continue where it is assessed as a safe to do so. There is more information about IP visits later on in this guidance.

Reasons for visits may also include Regulator's Assurance visits (see [Summary Update from Our Regulators](#)) or operational monitoring and support for services at risk of Inadequate/ Requires improvement judgments, under new management / Safeguarding or investigation etc. Visitors to services by others working in any of the business support functions should remain essential only. This will again, be based on the Visitor's Risk Assessment which outcome of will be discussed with the visitor intending to visit.

If a Registered Manager refuses access to a support service this should be escalated to the MD and reasons for refusal discussed.

If a service has clinically extremely vulnerable young people, the manager will need to assess any risks that may arise from other young people going home or visits to the services including inside the home, where this is allowed by in different parts of UK.

Visitors to the service are expected to wear a face-covering when they enter the service and continue wearing it during the visit until they leave. If the visitors for any reasons do not have a face-covering available, staff should provide a mask for them to prevent possible transmission to the person they are visiting and others. If the area from where they are coming is identified as being in local lockdown, then they must not travel out of that area.

In case of any testing taking place outside of the home, for example community or home testing, staff and visitors must inform the care home so that the result is factored into the decision-making process and risk assessment. Visitors who have had a test should not visit the home regardless of that test result, until 14 days from exposure have passed.

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Evidence of outbreaks and recovery from outbreaks should also be considered (a recovered outbreak is defined as 28 days or more since the last suspected or confirmed case reported).

Other areas to consider has been explored in the *Visits to services – Covid19 guidance for Visitors and Visitor's Risk Assessments*.

Independent Person (IP) visits

If the Visitor's Risk Assessment allows, depending on the service, some visits may take longer than 3hrs with the additional work being completed outside the home/service (e.g. larger services with multiple homes under one registration). Taking this into consideration, IP visits which are part of a statutory duty will be exempt from the 3 hrs time limit recommendation for **general visits** explored later on in this guidance.

For children's services as a whole, the following process should be followed:

1. The Register Manager/delegated person must complete a 'Visitor Risk Assessment' prior to any proposed visit.
2. If you answer 'Yes' to any of the questions then the visit indoors **cannot take place**.
3. It's the Registered Manger/delegated person's responsibility to complete the Visitor Risk Assessment with all young people, staff and visitors in mind. It's the Registered Manager/delegated person's responsibility to make contact with the visitor and ask them the relevant risk assessment questions. See below for independent visits conducted by NYAS.
4. Once the Visitor Risk Assessment is completed a decision will be made (all responses must be 'No' for an indoor visit to be considered). If an indoor visit cannot take place then the option of an outdoor visit (with social distancing), virtual visits or a telephone call can be made. Visit/Contact with all family, friends and professionals is essential.
5. Following the result of the Visitor Risk Assessment the Registered Manager/delegated person must discuss the decision with their line manager for final approval. Once the type of visit has been agreed then the Registered Manager/delegated person can then proceed to make the necessary arrangements with the visitor. It is essential to manage the visitor's expectations.
6. On the day of the visit, it's the responsibility of the Registered Manager/delegated person to contact the visitor to check that the previously completed Visitor Risk Assessment is still valid and the visitor must confirm that they still have no Covid19 symptoms. Any changes to the original risk assessment or symptoms will result in the visit being cancelled as an indoor visit but can proceed as a virtual visit or telephone call.

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7. The Registered Manager/delegated person must ensure that the home is prepared for the visit. Hand washing, cleaning materials in the toilet for the visitor to use (it's recommended that you explain exactly how the toilet and surfaces need cleaning to the visitor) and cleaning materials available following the visit (to wipe down surfaces and door handles etc).
8. During an indoor visit, if it becomes clear that the risk assessment cannot be implemented effectively then the visit must be stopped and alternative arrangements made.

Services in receipt of NYAS Independent Person visits

A while ago NYAS began their phased return to face to face service delivery for Independent monitoring visits, informed by the Visitor Risk Assessment. Considering increasing number of positive cases, it is recommended that this individual risk-based approach continues. We are not sure when face to face visits will be fully reinstated. The most important consideration for now is to ensure services continue completing Visitor Risk Assessments, so that our young people and the staff working with them are safe. There will be homes which will be strictly limiting any visits and may still request that visits are conducted virtually, whilst other homes subject to local restrictions will be transitioning back from face to face visit to virtual visits. Face to face visits should only resume/continue taking place where it is safe to do so.

Prior to a face to face visit, the following steps must be taken by the Independent Visitor and the Registered Manager:

1. All Independent Visitors have to read NYAS guidance and return IV signature form to NYAS Service Manager (circulated on 3rd July)
2. All visits will be announced. Independent Visitors have to contact Registered Manager to make appointment for visit and to complete risk assessment A (circulated on 3rd July)
3. The Registered Manager must send a copy of the individual homes risk assessment to the Independent Visitor prior to the visit (This is Visitors Risk Assessment – visiting Young People inside the home, circulated on 3rd July).
4. Visitors will return risk assessment A and the homes risk assessment to NYAS Service Manager.
5. Independent Visitor must check with the home on the day of the visit that it is still safe to proceed with a face to face visit.

Family meeting away from services (read in conjunction with Social distancing guidance).

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Where required, staff will accompany young people on visits to support social distancing. Visits will only take place where staffing levels allow and may be time-limited according to availability of staff.

Children's homes are considered a household and even if staff take the number in the bubble above 6, they are exempt from the general gathering rules as the gathering is due to work.

Day trips to outdoor open space might be allowed, but consideration must be had to the national and local guidance for example:

- [England – Tier 1] *you must not socialise in groups larger than 6, indoors or outdoors (other than where a legal exemption applies).*
- [England – Tier 2] *you must not socialise in a group of more than 6 outside, including in a garden or other spaces like beaches or parks (other than where specific exemptions apply in law).*
- [England – Tier 3] *you must not socialise in a group of more than 6 in an outdoor public space such as a park or beach, the countryside, a public garden or a sports venue.*

Young people and staff should take hygiene and safety precautions if using services on the way. Young people and staff should practise social distancing from other people outside of the service household.

Travelling

People should not travel at all if they:

- are experiencing any [coronavirus symptoms](#)
- are [self-isolating as a result of coronavirus symptoms or sharing a household or support bubble with somebody with symptoms](#)
- are [clinically extremely vulnerable](#) and live in an area where additional public health measures mean you have been advised to resume shielding.
- have been told by the [NHS Test and Trace service to self-isolate](#) – find out how the [NHS Test and Trace works](#)

Overnight stays - where allowed by respective governments, in England – medium alert areas (Tier 1) only.

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We are aware that families may wish to have their loved ones home for a longer duration. As the young person lives in a children's home/care home, there are a number of considerations that the manager will need to assess.

Our homes should be viewed as a household as young people live together. We need to be cautious in introducing too many contacts to this household.

Relatives are asked to consider the wellbeing of all young people within a home/service.

If there are extremely vulnerable young people at high risk within the service, the service may require young people returning from home visits to isolate for 14 days.

If a young person stays overnight, we will request that families do not attend any gatherings outside of the single household, maintain social distancing as much as possible, and clean areas of use such as toilets, surfaces, utensils before and after use.

Additional factors to consider

- Will meetings put a clinically extremely vulnerable young person at risk? Can the clinically extremely vulnerable child/young person be protected from any additional risk(s)? If there are concerns, have these been discussed with the family/those with parental responsibilities? Where required, you should extend such discussion to social workers.
- Choose a suitable venue for the meeting e.g. local park / go for a walk/ open public space/ private garden
- Is the young person able to maintain social distancing? Does the young person understand the rules? Is the family/those with parental responsibilities involved and in agreement? Have you considered the young person's capacity (16+) to understand rules, and where required liaised with the family/those with parental responsibilities?
- Are the family/those with parental responsibilities able to maintain social distancing?
- How will conflicts or emotions be managed where some individuals are able to meet family, and others cannot?
- Remember masks are advised in public spaces that may be crowded such as shops or public transport. Where face covering is compulsory, can young person wear a face covering without an issue?
- You should travel to meetings by walking/cycling or in a car. It is difficult to maintain social distancing in private cars, however this may be a lesser risk than catching public transport and using a private vehicle with face covering may be a safer option.