

[Skip to content](#)



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[Top of Form](#)

Site Search *

[Bottom of Form](#)

Main menu

- [Home](#)
- [Topics](#)
- [Publications](#)
- [Consultations](#)
- [Contact](#)

[Swann announces changes to visiting guidance](#)

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Health Minister Robin Swann today announced changes to restrictions on visiting across all care settings from Monday 6 July.

COVID-19 UPDATE

The revised guidance recognises the right of people to visit their loved ones in hospitals and care homes, while balancing the ongoing risk from Covid-19.

Decisions on allowing visitors will now be made on a day to day basis, by the nurse in charge in hospitals, or by the manager in care homes, and will depend on the ability to ensure social distancing and safety of both patients/residents and the visitors.

All visitors to hospitals and care homes are now also required to wear a face covering.

Health Minister Robin Swann said: **“I understand that the temporary restrictions on visiting have been a particularly difficult consequence of Covid-19. However they were necessary in limiting the spread of the virus. I am acutely aware that there are many families yearning to see a loved one, either in hospital or in our care homes.**

“As such I tasked officials, headed up by my Chief Nursing Officer (CNO), Professor Charlotte McArdle, to review the current visiting guidance.

“Following a review of the evidence, the Strategic Clinical Advisory Cell (SCAC) and CNO have published revised visiting guidance for all Health and Social Care Trust inpatient services including maternity services, mental health and learning disability inpatient services, care homes and hospices. This is effective from Monday 6 July.”

The Minister added: **“While today’s announcement will be welcome news, we must remain mindful of the risk of this virus and as such virtual visiting is the preferred option where possible. If this is not possible then social distancing and hand washing remain vital.”**

The changes to the visiting guidance will be applied as long as the surge level and the Northern Ireland Executive five step approach permits. Its application across the full range of different areas of care is outlined, with approved visiting guidance aligned to the pandemic surge levels/R value, based on the best scientific advice available at any given time.

The new guidance includes a number of measures including:

- In both general wards and intensive care units, one visitor will now be permitted per patient.
- In Covid-19 free care homes one person will be permitted access to visit at any one time and if necessary a second person if required will be accommodated where possible, as long as this can be carried out safely and under the usual social distancing requirements.
- Birth partners will be facilitated to accompany women to pregnancy dating scans, anomaly scans, early pregnancy clinic and fetal medicine appointments, for induction of labour, the duration of labour and for birth as well as to visit in antenatal and postnatal wards as appropriate.

Anyone showing or experiencing the symptoms of COVID-19 or any other infection should not visit, even if these symptoms are mild and unconfirmed.

Visitors to any setting must rigorously follow public health hygiene advice – washing hands before and after visits, using hand sanitiser gel and maintain social distancing.

The public are asked to be mindful of the logistical challenges facing Trusts and care homes, as they deal with increased numbers of visitors while also continuing to work hard to counter the Covid-19 threat.

Notes to editors:

1. The updated guidance, COVID-19: Regional Principles for Visiting in Care Settings in Northern Ireland can be found on the Department's website.
2. For media enquiries please contact DoH Press Office by email: pressoffice@health-ni.gov.uk.
3. Follow us on twitter [@healthdpt](#)(external link opens in a new window / tab).
4. The Executive Information Service operates an out of hours service for media enquiries between 1800hrs and 0800hrs Monday to Friday and at weekends and public holidays. The duty press officer can be contacted on 028 9037 8110.

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