

Although all wards received the same guidance from Public Health England, there was clearly significant variation in the policies around allowing children to see their families face to face. The first guidance on visits to inpatient wards was not issued by the NHS until 8th April, which would explain variation prior to that point. The guidance stated that parents should be allowed to visit children in hospital, and yet there was still significant variation in how this was applied and when wards managed to facilitate visits.

It is important that under any future local lockdowns guidance clarifies expectations about visits to children in inpatient settings, and that settings learn from those which were able to continue visits in safe ways.

One provider stated that for some children the reduction in contact with family was welcome:

'This was a largely positive experience. Patients were able to choose to have as much video contact as they wished with parents. Only rarely would there be any distress about this. Most of the urgency for visits came from the parents themselves.'

There may be a range of reasons that children find it difficult to see their family, and for some children it may sadly be in their best interests for contact to be limited. However, one child explained to us that seeing family was distressing, but explained that this was because:

'there was so much pressure on the time, and it was hard when they left not to go with them'

Care must therefore be taken not to misconstrue any positive effects of reducing family visits, and consideration must be given to the potentially distressing way in which visits are managed.