

From: Department of Health <Health-Correspondence@cloud.gov.ie>
Sent: Friday 27 November 2020 18:13
To: Office Manager <officemanager@iasw.ie>
Subject: HEA-MO-03711-2020

HEA-MO-03711-2020
27th November 2020
Dear Ms. McGoldrick,

The Minister for Health, Stephen Donnelly T.D., has asked me to thank you for your email dated 23 September concerning nursing home visitation restrictions. I apologise for the delay in replying, I am sure you will appreciate the sheer volume of correspondence we are processing at this time.

The importance of continued social interaction of residents and their families cannot be overstated and every effort should be made, in line with public health advice, to ensure that these interactions continue, including through window visits.

Nursing home providers are ultimately responsible for the safe care of their residents. Under Regulation 11 of the Health Act 2007 (Care and Welfare of Residents in Designated Centres for Older People) Regulations 2013 it is the legal responsibility of each registered provider to make arrangements for a resident to receive visitors, having regard to any risks that may present for the resident or other residents. Public health guidance has been developed in order to assist and support providers in this regard.

The current guidance aligns with the 5 level framework of restrictive measures as outlined in the Government's Living with COVID-19 Plan, to support long-term residential care providers in the discharge of their responsibilities and to support in the safe visiting, to the greatest extent possible, having regard for the challenging times in which we are living.

Minister Donnelly encourages all nursing homes to remain familiar with the latest public health advice and support, and to make every effort to continue to facilitate visitors in line with public health advice and to communicate with family and friends on an ongoing basis in order to support positive mental health and wellbeing. The Minister has communicated with the sector outlining the need for them to be flexible, innovative and to facilitate to the greatest extent possible alternative arrangements such as window visiting, in line with public health advice.

The Minister understands that the Health Protection Surveillance Centre is currently reviewing the public health guidance on visiting, in consultation with relevant national stakeholders, to consider, in line with the range of public health factors, further potential for safe visiting within nursing homes. Visiting guidance is being considered in the context of the wider COVID-19 situation, as we plan and prepare for exiting level 5 restrictions.

Notwithstanding this, it is also important to be cognisant of the wider epidemiological situation and the risks associated with same. On the 19th of November, the European Centre for Disease Control published its latest risk assessment with regard to long-term care facilities. It highlights that the probability of COVID-19 introduction into a long-term facility depends on the level of

COVID-19 circulation in the community, with a higher risk associated with higher incidences rates in the community.

This highlights the importance of suppressing the level of the virus in the community as one of the primary measures for protecting nursing homes. As citizens, we all have a responsibility in this regard and our actions across all of society can directly impact the outcomes for nursing home residents.

I hope this has been of assistance to you.

Yours sincerely,
Miriam Rooney
Private Secretary to the Minister for Health