



## **Covid-19 update 3/6/2020**

Dear

As always, I hope this letter finds you well. Since the last update little had changed until the relaxation of the national lockdown. Whilst welcomed by many this is still a worrying time for some, and we continue to work hard to protect our residents and staff.

Over the last few weeks we have brought in our new visiting rules, and these appear to be working well. I know it is frustrating for many of you that only one family member is able to visit. Many of you have asked if we will be changing or relaxing these rules as a result of recent changes to the national lockdown. At the moment the answer to this is, I'm afraid, that we won't be, and I want to explain our reasons for this below.

Until we have access to an effective vaccine or other treatment for Covid-19 we need to ensure we keep a variety of Covid-19 precautions in place. Nationally the Covid-19 alert level remains at 4, which indicates that there is still a high level of transmission of the virus between individuals. Members of SAGE (the national scientific advisory group) have expressed thoughts that lockdown has been relaxed too early, whilst the R Value – the average number of people infected by a person carrying Covid-19 – remains only marginally below 1. This value may well be different in different localities as there are still regional differences in R with pressure in the north east increasing, whilst in London and the south they are decreasing. However, we cannot at this stage ignore the national rating and the risk of a second wave.

'Track and trace' remains the best way to manage the risk of further outbreaks of Covid-19, but at the moment this is simply not supported by adequate technology and infrastructure. The success of track and trace is dependent on an ability to access good testing, which is not yet in place.

We have requested testing kits so that we are able to test all our residents and staff. This is as part of a national initiative, but we have yet to receive tests. Currently we have no confirmed or suspected cases of Covid-19 in either home, which is good news. However, it is possible that residents or staff are asymptomatic; that is, they are carrying the virus, but not displaying any symptoms. We will not know this until we have been able to complete testing.

Therefore, at this stage there is a risk that visitors to the Home may carry infection back out into the community, as much as they may carry the virus in. The relaxation of lockdown also means that our own staff are coming into greater contact with more people in the community and we need to understand the impact of this before we can make any major changes to current arrangements.

As a result, we need to keep following our current restricted visiting programme to continue to reduce the risk level and play our part in keeping the R value as low as possible.

As opening the Homes up to visitors will increase the risk of further outbreaks of Covid-19, a key part of our C19 management strategy going forward is to have outbreak plans in place. For these to be effective they need to be closely aligned with the local authority outbreak planning and contingency measures.

These plans require more time to be fully developed and fit for purpose. Our own plans must fit with local management as our Homes are located, and our staff live, within local communities. For these plans to be fully developed and effective several criteria need to be met, including:

- Easy booking and access to testing
- A shorter period of time between a test be conducted and the result being made available
- Clear advice for ambiguous test results

Unfortunately, lockdown restrictions have been lifted before the capability to meet these requirements have been fully developed and tested. We do not feel that we can relax visiting rules until local response structures are in place.

I know that this is disappointing news for everyone, and it is not a decision easily made, but we believe it is the best decision at the current time. We will of course review this decision frequently and keep you all updated on any changes. I hope that you will understand and continue to provide us with the amazing and valued support we have had from you all to date – it really is appreciated by all of us.

Stay safe everyone

Richard

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Please send all post to: **Sears Healthcare Limited**  
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