

General Debate on Covid-19 – 12th January 2021

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This briefing includes:

1. Suggested interventions
2. Vaccinations
3. Care home visitor guidance
4. Deaths in care homes

1. Suggested Interventions to the Prime Minister

- *We are all concerned about the sharp rise in Covid-19 cases and doing all we can to bring the figures down. To lift the spirits of thousands of families around the country, can I ask the Prime Minister to provide an update on visits to care homes including any necessary revisions to the key worker visitor scheme that he committed to implementing - to ensure that safe care home visits are prioritised during this lockdown so families and friends stay connected?*
- *Data from care homes indicates that rates of death are below their five-year average, despite the spike in cases nationwide. We did see 602 deaths in care homes in the first week of December and unfortunately can only anticipate that that figure has increased. What assessment has the Prime Minister made of deaths in care homes recently, and can he provide the House with figures showing the proportion of care home residents who have died during this time?*
- *Alzheimer's Society has let me know that many of its staff are in frontline positions, providing vital support services to people affected by dementia and that its staff would like to return to face-to-face provision to provide the best care possible. Can the Prime Minister share with the House how frontline charity staff like those employed by Alzheimer's Society and other organisations will be categorised on the vaccine priority list?*
- *Can the Prime Minister commit to publishing regular statistics on the number of care home residents that have received both the first and second dose of the vaccine including, crucially, what proportion of the care home resident population has been vaccinated?*
- *The average time residents spend in a care home prior to death is just over 2 years.¹ Many of my constituents are understandably concerned about seeing their loved ones. Can the Prime Minister tell the House when he expects care home residents to have close, meaningful contact with their loved ones again?*

2. Vaccinations

The Minister for COVID-19 Vaccine Deployment, Nadhim Zahawi MP, has stated the Government's goal is to vaccinate 13.9 million people by mid-February, in line with the Government's objective to vaccinate everyone in the JCVI top four priority groups².

Care homes have rightly been put top of the vaccination priority list. Vaccines must swiftly be rolled out to all care home residents, many of whom are still waiting to properly see and hug their loved ones.

The Government needs to publish the clear picture of vaccines being given in care homes. Alzheimer's Society believes that to give a full picture of progress, both the percentage and raw numbers of vaccinations of each of the top four JCVI vaccination groups carried out must be shared with the public. In the case of the first group, the Government should publish the proportion of vaccines which have gone to residents and staff respectively and the number of vaccinations which

¹ Forder, J and Fernandez, J-L (2011) Length of stay in care homes, Report commissioned by Bupa Care Services, PSSRU Discussion Paper 2769, Canterbury: PSSRU

² Bland, Archie (2021) The Guardian 'Vaccine Minister vows massive uplift in number of jobs this week' <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jan/06/uk-vaccine-minister-vows-massive-uplift-in-number-of-jobs-this-week> [Accessed 8th January 2021]

have been offered and taken up, by first and second dose. If possible, this should be published on a regional basis so that successes or lags can be identified.

3. Care home visitor guidance

Throughout the course of the pandemic, Alzheimer's Society has been regularly speaking with Ministers to ensure that people living in care homes can receive visits from their loved ones. Family and friends provide an important element of care to people with dementia living in care homes and findings from Alzheimer's Society studies have shown the devastating impact the stopping of visits has had on residents with dementia.

A study conducted by Alzheimer's Society in August 2020 found that 79% of care home managers reported lack of social contact was causing deterioration in health and wellbeing of their residents with dementia.³ Alzheimer's Society welcomed the Government's commitment in October 2020 that by 18th December, residents' loved ones would be given keyworker status, with access to PPE and testing which would allow them to safely visit in care homes – in line with Alzheimer's Society's calls. We are extremely concerned that this announcement appears to have been quietly reversed.

The most recent iteration of guidance, published in [National Lockdown Guidance](#) on 4 January 2021, states that *close-contact indoor visits are not allowed. No visits will be permitted in the event of an outbreak.*⁴

Alzheimer's Society would like the Government to provide care homes, residents and families with some clarity on whether the complete vaccination of all care home residents and staff who wish to be vaccinated will enable close contact visits to resume, and whether there are any acceptable modifications to the keyworker scheme which would allow the Government to approve close contact visits as soon as possible.

4. Deaths in care homes

In spring 2020, Alzheimer's Society spoke regularly with the Government to ensure that the number of those dying in care homes from Covid-19 was recorded. Alzheimer's Society welcomed the commitment from Government in April 2020 to record and regularly publish the data –this helped the Government and care sector gain a greater understanding of how people in care homes are being impacted by the virus. Given that people with dementia are estimated to make up at least 70% of care home residents, Alzheimer's Society is concerned that any increase in deaths amongst care home residents will have a significant impact on the lives of people with dementia.

Between March and June 2020, dementia was the most common pre-existing condition with for Covid-19 deaths, and more than a quarter (27.5%) of people who died with Covid-19 from March to June had dementia.⁵ Moreover, the largest increase in excess non-Covid-19 deaths was in people with dementia.

Recent data from care homes indicates that rates of death are below their five-year average, despite a significant rise in Covid-19 cases nationwide. Figures from the most recent week available (w/b 4th December 2020) show that there were 602 deaths from Covid-19 in care homes but 453 fewer overall deaths than the five-year average.⁶

Given the discrepancy between rapidly rising case rates and death rates in the wider UK from Covid-19 but lower than average five-year average deaths in care homes, Alzheimer's Society would like to hear the Government's assessment of the situation. Alzheimer's Society believes this could be caused by a lower than normal occupancy rate in care homes but would like the Government to publish figures showing the proportion of care home residents who have died during this time.

³ Alzheimer's Society (2020) 'Worst hit: dementia during coronavirus' <https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-09/Worst-hit-Dementia-during-coronavirus-report.pdf>

⁴ Cabinet Office 'Stay at home' guidance 2021 <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-lockdown-stay-at-home>

⁶ ONS (2021) Number of deaths in care homes notified to the CQC England <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/datasets/numberofdeathsincarehomesnotifiedtothecarequalitycommissionengland> [Accessed 8 January 2021]