

Health and Social Care Select Committee – Evidence session with Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP

Contact: Laura Mullaney, Alzheimer's Society: laura.mullaney@alzheimers.org.uk

This briefing includes:

1. Suggested questions for the Secretary of State
2. Care home visitor guidance
3. Deaths in care homes

1. Suggested questions for the Secretary of State

- *Can the Secretary of State 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 which proportion of the care home resident population has been vaccinated?*
- *Can the Secretary of State confirm that under the care home visitor key worker scheme the Government committed to implement, visitors would receive the same access to testing and PPE as care home staff and so would not provide any additional risk to care home residents?*
- *Can the Secretary of State provide an update on the Government's commitment, made in October, that care home residents will be able to receive meaningful visits from loved ones by Christmas 2020?*
- *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 Secretary of State share with the Committee how frontline charity staff like those employed by Alzheimer's Society and other organisations will be categorised on the vaccine priority list?*
- *Can the Secretary of State update the Committee on how many care home staff and residents have so far refused the vaccine?*
- *As part of the Prime Minister's regular vaccination update from next week, can the Secretary of State ensure that the Government publishes 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?*

2. Care home visitor guidance

Throughout the course of the pandemic Alzheimer's Society has been regularly speaking with Government 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.¹

Alzheimer's Society welcomed the Government's commitment in October 2020 that by December 18th, resident's loved ones will be given Key Worker 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.

¹ <https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-09/Worst-hit-Dementia-during-coronavirus-report.pdf>

The most recent iteration of guidance, published in [National Lockdown Guidance](#) on 4 January 2021, contains statements which are contradictory and unclear and Alzheimer's Society is seeking urgent clarification from Government on this. The guidance gives two opposing statements on care home visits, which Alzheimer's Society are concerned will cause confusion amongst the sector and public.

- 1) The guidance states that "*you can also leave home to visit someone who is dying or someone in a care home (if permitted under care home guidance)*"². Current care home guidance allows indoor close-contact visits if the visitor has been tested and wears suitable PPE.
- 2) However, the National Lockdown Guidance later states that "*close-contact indoor visits are not allowed. No visits will be permitted in the event of an outbreak.*"³

Alzheimer's Society would like the Government to provide care homes, residents and families some clarity on whether they can see each other in person and on what basis.

3. Deaths in care homes

In the spring of 2020 Alzheimer's Society was regularly speaking 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 this data and publish it regularly – we believe that this has 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 are 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, at the height of the first wave of the pandemic, 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.⁴ Moreover, the largest increase in excess non-Covid-19 deaths was in people with dementia. There were more than 5,000 excess deaths of people with dementia between 4 January and 10 July, in addition to the deaths attributed directly to Covid-19⁵.

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.

²https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/949536/NationalLockdownGuidance.pdf

³https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/949536/NationalLockdownGuidance.pdf

⁴<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/bulletins/deathsinvolvingcovid19englandandwales/deathsocurringinjune2020>

⁵ Dataset: Death registrations not involving coronavirus (COVID-19): England and Wales, 02 September 2020, [Online] 2020.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/datasets/deathregistrationsnotinvolvingcoronaviruscovid19englandandwales>

⁶<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/datasets/numberofdeathsincarehomesnotifiedtothecarequalitycommissionengland>