

Alzheimer's Society Briefing – Impact of Covid-19 and restrictions on people over 75

Full House of Lords Question: *the impact of (1) the COVID-19 pandemic, and (2) the subsequent restrictions put in place to address the pandemic, on those aged over 75.*

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This briefing includes the following:

1. Key questions
2. Prevalence of dementia
3. The impact of a lack of social contact on people with dementia in care homes
4. The impact of lockdown on the loved ones and carers of people with dementia

1. Key questions

I congratulate the NHS, the Government, the Secretary of State and all the healthcare professionals on their work to ensure the vaccine is rolled out to the most vulnerable in our society as quickly as possible. To ensure we can properly understand the progress of the vaccination programme, will the noble 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, providing that information as both a number and a percentage of the overall care home population?

Many care home residents have now gone over 10 months without receiving any meaningful visits from their loved ones, denying them an important element of care. Can the noble Lord please tell the House, whether the level of protection offered by the first dose will be enough to enable meaningful in-person care home visits to restart, alongside other infection control measures? If not, at what point in the vaccination programme can we expect care home visits to start happening again.

2. Prevalence of dementia

There are an estimated 850,000 people living with dementia in England¹. Over 370,000 people over 75 have dementia in England². One in six over 80s has dementia in England³. In the UK, 4 in 10 people with dementia are in residential care, 6 in 10 live in the community.⁴ By severity, 14% of people with dementia are living with mild dementia, 28% moderate and 58% are at the severe stage of dementia⁵.

3. Vaccination of people with dementia over 75

People aged 75 fall into Category 3 of the JCVI immunisation priority groups, whilst care home residents are Category 1; the Government has confirmed that all care home residents where safe have been offered a vaccine. As the risk of mortality from COVID-19 increases with age, prioritisation is primarily based on age. Roll-out of vaccinations appears to be going well but the necessary data to fully understand the picture is not yet available.

Alzheimer's Society would like the Government to begin publishing the number of those in each priority band who have received both the first, and second dose of the vaccine., as a percentage and raw number. We need clarity from the government about whether the level of protection offered by the first dose of a vaccine is enough to enable meaningful in-person care homes visits to restart, alongside other infection control measures.

4. The impact of a lack of social contact on people with dementia in care homes

Throughout the course of the pandemic Alzheimer's Society has been working with Government to ensure that people living in care homes can receive visits from their loved ones. Social stimulation and regular face to

1 Wittenberg et al. Projections of Older People with Dementia and Costs of Dementia Care in the United Kingdom, 2019-2040 (2019)

2 NHS Digital Recorded Dementia Diagnosis <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/recorded-dementia-diagnoses/december-2020>

3 Prince, M et al (2014) Dementia UK: Update Second Edition Alzheimer's

Society https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/sites/default/files/migrate/downloads/dementia_uk_update.pdf

4 Ibid

5 Wittenberg et al. Projections of Older People with Dementia and Costs of Dementia Care in the United Kingdom, 2019-2040 (2019)

face contact with loved ones often not only helps people living with dementia to feel secure and improve mood, but also helps them to maintain cognition and communication skills.

We know that some care homes have enabled friends and family members have been able to stay in touch with their loved ones through video or phone calls. However, a digital 'visit' only allows for certain interactions to take place and family members can't be involved or check on the care their loved ones are being provided for.

Many care homes have closed their doors to visitors during the pandemic. Around 97%⁶ of care homes closed to visitors during the first wave, according to the latest ONS data from July. If people living with dementia are unable to maintain their skills through socialising, they can quickly lose them. An Alzheimer's Society survey found that the most common symptoms that people living with dementia reported having increased since lockdown began were difficulty concentrating, memory loss and agitation or restlessness⁷. Furthermore, an Alzheimer's Society survey from August 2020 found that 79% of care home managers reported a worsening of symptoms amongst care home residents with dementia during lockdown.

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Alzheimer's Society believes that the Government must recognise that family carers are an integral part of the care system. They help with practical elements of care, they support communication, and they provide companionship.

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5. The impact of lockdown on the loved ones and carers of people with dementia

*63% of carers for those with dementia are over the age of 65.*⁸ An Alzheimer's Society survey, conducted in August 2020, found that family and friends of people with dementia have spent an extra 92 million hours caring for loved ones with dementia⁹ during the pandemic. Even before lockdown, and in the context of a struggling social care system, more than 40% of family and friend carers of people with dementia were reporting providing more than 100 hours a week of care to their loved ones.

Caring for a loved one with dementia can be hugely rewarding, but it can also be very challenging without the right support. 95% of carers we surveyed reported that the increased caring responsibilities had an impact on their mental or physical health; 69% reported that they feel constantly exhausted, 64% feel anxious, 50% have developed problems sleeping and 49% feel depressed¹⁰.

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6 ONS. Impact of coronavirus in care homes (released 3rd July 2020)

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/conditionsanddiseases/articles/impactofcoronavirussincarehomesinenglandvivaldi/26mayto19june2020>

7 Alzheimer's Society. Alzheimer's Society online survey: The impact of COVID-19 on People Affected by Dementia. [Online] 2020.

<https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/news/2020-07-30/lockdown-isolation-causes-shocking-levels-decline-people-dementia-who-are-rapidly>.

8 NHS Personal Social Services Survey of Adult Carers 2018/20 <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/personal-social-services-survey-of-adult-carers>

9 Alzheimer's Society [2020] <https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/lockdowncarerhours>

10 Alzheimer's Society. Alzheimer's Society online survey: The impact of COVID-19 on People Affected by Dementia. [Online] 2020.

<https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/news/2020-07-30/lockdown-isolation-causes-shocking-levels-decline-people-dementia-who-are-rapidly>.

11 NHS Personal Social Services Survey of Adult Carers 2018/20 <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/personal-social-services-survey-of-adult-carers>

12 Alzheimer's Society [2020] <https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/lockdowncarerhours>