

21.03.02

9 Deputy S.M. Ahier of St. Helier of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding the restrictions on relatives visiting family members in care homes (OQ.57/2021):

Will the Minister advise the Assembly whether he intends to relax the restrictions on relatives visiting family members in care homes?

The Deputy of St. Ouen (The Minister for Health and Social Services):

Public health guidance for visiting in care homes is reviewed on a 3-weekly basis, taking into account the latest data and Island context with respect to COVID-19. An update to the guidance published on 23rd February considered feedback from care homes and builds on previous guidance to incorporate bespoke advice for visiting in Jersey hospice care. Following the advice of the deputy medical officer of health, a cautious approach was maintained regarding the number of named visitors recommended and the frequency of visits, allowing any impact of recent increased activity among the wider community to be assessed while the changes in care home guidance are considered. I will be reviewing the need for any further changes to the guidance, for example considering whether further flexibility can be safely given, ahead of 16th March when the next update is due to be published. This will take into consideration key indicators such as detailed vaccination coverage, data among care home residents and staff, local COVID activity data and the latest medical advice from the deputy medical officer of health, together with further feedback from care homes.

3.9.1 Deputy S.M. Ahier:

The guidance for visiting care homes states that it will be reviewed to ensure it reflects changes to COVID-19 transmission rates in Jersey. With active cases now at 14, is it not time the Minister allowed family members access to their loved ones?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

It is vitally important that those in care homes do have access to their loved ones, do have access to venues outside their care homes that are safe. That is recognised as something that is so important to their well-being and general mental health and is taken into account and will be taken into account very firmly when the next guidance is released on 16th March.

3.9.2 The Connétable of St. Helier:

I should declare an interest in having a relative in a care home. Could the Minister explain the logic of the current guidelines which restrict visitors to, generally speaking, 3 visits a week for 2 named and tested visitors? Why is it not possible if so preferred for the care home resident to receive a visit on 6 days from a single visitor duly tested and in a healthy state? I personally cannot see why there is any increase in risk. In fact, I would say there is more of an increase in risk in allowing 2 visitors rather than one.

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

It is an interesting question, the issue of trying to balance the risks so these factors are put before the infection control team and the deputy medical officer of health. It is largely their guidance that has been pursued and they decided that that frequency of visits was too great a risk at the moment, so that has not been included in the guidance. But I undertake to put it again when considering the next review.

3.9.3 The Connétable of St. Helier:

Does the Minister not agree with me that there is no increase in frequency if it is one person visiting 6 times than having 2 people visiting 3 times? There is surely less risk involved in it being a single visitor.

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I can see the argument that the Connétable is putting forward. I do not have a response from infection control of why they might see things differently but I undertake to put the Connétable's argument in our next discussions.

3.9.4 Deputy S.M. Ahier:

The guidance mentions that for visits to residents who are not fully vaccinated there is only a maximum of one named visitor per resident. Parents are having to choose who can visit their child and children are having to decide which one of them can visit their parent. When does the Minister intend to change this prohibitive policy?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

That may be changed from 16th March if it is deemed safe to do so in terms of controlling the spread and risks of infection from COVID-19. The point made by the Deputy is understood. We will attempt to balance those risks and restore those liberties to care home residents if at all possible in the context we find ourselves in. I am sincerely hoping we will be able to make a further relaxation of restrictions at the next review.