

Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP
Chair, Health and Social Care Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Office of the Chief Executive
NHS England and NHS Improvement

21 March 2022

Dear Jeremy

Re: Healthcare visiting guidance and Covid-19

Thank you for your letter about our guidance on inpatient visiting during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The NHS welcomes visiting in inpatient settings and the contribution that visiting makes to the wellbeing and the person-centred care of patients. We also know that the lack of access to visitors can cause distress to patients and their families and friends.

We have recently updated this guidance to say that visiting should be accommodated for at least one hour per day and ideally for longer. The latest version is available at [Coronavirus » Visiting healthcare inpatient settings during the COVID-19 pandemic \(england.nhs.uk\)](https://www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/visiting-healthcare-inpatient-settings-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/).

The updated document supersedes all previous guidance, including the resources cited in your letter and we expect providers to facilitate this in a risk-managed way.

The guidance is intended to support local decisions made by the Director of Public Health who is accountable for public health in their area. It sets out how NHS, and other healthcare organisations, should facilitate visiting across healthcare inpatient settings, including mental health, learning disability and autism, children and maternity.

I hope this provides the information sought by the Committee.

Best wishes



Amanda Pritchard
NHS Chief Executive



Health and Social Care Committee
House of Commons London SW1A 0AA
Tel: 020 7219 6182 Fax 020 7219 5171 Email:
hsccom@parliament.uk Website: www.parliament.uk/hsccom
Twitter: [@CommonsHealth](https://twitter.com/CommonsHealth)

From Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP

Amanda Pritchard
NHS England Chief Executive

2 March 2022

Dear Amanda,

I am writing to you following correspondence I have received from a member of the public. It expresses concerns regarding an apparent incongruity between two NHSE documents that are intended to provide guidance on visiting inpatients during the pandemic. These documents were both updated on 1 January 2022, and are titled:

- [Visiting healthcare inpatient settings during the COVID-19 pandemic: principles](#)
- [Visiting guidance adult healthcare settings trigger tool](#)

The trigger tool is a flow chart that describes how to assess visits in adult healthcare inpatient settings. Unless the patient is in their last week of life, the chart directs that if the “organisation’s incident management team [has] determined that visiting is restricted”, the guidance is to “consider virtual visiting”. If visiting has not been restricted, the flow chart directs instead to follow the “principles” document.

However, this does not appear to be consistent with the guidance in the “principles” document, which in “Appendix A” describes several “exceptional circumstances” in which inpatient visiting should be allowed. These are not limited to patients receiving end-of-life care. They include, for example, visits that are necessary to meet patients’ “health, emotional, religious or spiritual care needs”.

Although the “principles” document does state that “organisations can exercise discretion where COVID-19 rates are higher”, it does not explain what exactly is meant by this. The “principles” document also does not seem to suggest that the guidance within it can be disregarded should the organisation’s incident management team determine that visiting is restricted, as the flow chart appears to.

I would be grateful if you could provide me with an update on the following points by 14 March:

- a clarification on the policy towards patient visiting at this point in the pandemic
- an update to the two guidance documents that clarifies how they relate to each other

I look forward to receiving your response.

Yours sincerely,

Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP
Chair, Health and Social Care Committee