

Covid-19 Updated Information for Middleton Hall Residents and Families 2020

51. Care Services – Covid update (17th June 2021)

As expected, the government has pushed back the date for further relaxation of restrictions to July 19th, to give more time for the vaccine roll out amidst increasing infection levels. Although the Tees Valley has lower infection levels than most parts of the north, they are increasing so we can expect that to continue over the next few weeks. It is not all bad news though. The increase is primarily in the under 60s as the vaccine reduces transmission and serious illness for Delta variant, when people have had both jabs.

We understand that there were no cases in care homes in Darlington last week. Nationally only 7 residents in care homes in England died from Covid in the last 7 day period which I think is the lowest since the pandemic started (this compares to between 1,000 and 3,000 weekly deaths in care homes at the peaks of the pandemic).

We have the first Co-owner for some time self-isolating after contact with someone testing positive. Although this should be very low risk for our vaccinated residents, we have put in a few precautions to avoid disruption to staffing if someone does test positive – daily testing for example.

As all residents are double vaccinated, we will continue to allow mixing with other services for social events and activities.

The government has also announced that they are going to make it compulsory for all staff working in care homes to be vaccinated, unless they have a medical exemption.

Quarantine

From June 21st, residents will no longer have to self-isolate if they spend a night away from a care home unless it is a high risk setting (eg hospital) and new residents moving into Middleton Hall will not need to self isolate, unless they are moving from another care home or hospital. There are requirements for PCR tests in the event of an overnight stay and risk assessment. We feel it is important that any overnight stay should be where all members of the household have had both vaccines. This would also apply for residents visiting family households inside rather than just garden visits under present guidance.

Delta Variant

The Delta (Indian) variant is far more transmissible (60% more than the Alpha or Kent variant) and more severe - without vaccination, people are twice as likely to be admitted to hospital. Research published from the “Zoe” app this week has also indicated that the Delta variant has different symptoms – more like a cold and generally without the loss of taste or smell. The three key signs now are headache, sore throat and runny nose:

[What are the Delta variant symptoms? - BBC News](#)

Orangery

You will see that the maintenance team have made some changes to the seating area outside the Orangery which should make it a more hospitable environment. The Orangery will be open 7 days a week again from Monday 21st.

National Garden Open Scheme

We are taking part in the NGS (National Garden Open Scheme) which raises money for charity on July 24th. This is being carefully controlled with visitor numbers to ensure that it is Covid-safe, but we would advise residents and families to avoid outside visiting on that day as there will be external people on tours around the grounds.

Thank you for your patience in helping Middleton Hall get through what should be the last part of the pandemic.

Stay safe

Jeremy Walford
Executive Chairman

50. Care Services – Covid update (3rd June 2021)

The sun has been shining, residents have been getting outside with visitors and infection levels locally remain low. Although nationally infection levels continue to rise owing to the “delta” variant (Indian variant) this appears to be primarily in the under 60s who have not received both doses of the vaccine.

This bulletin is primarily focused on visiting. There has been understandable confusion over the guidance that care homes have to follow as opposed to the lockdown restrictions that apply to the general population – there are considerably more restrictions for care homes, especially around visiting.

Last week we asked for your views on increased flexibility for limited hospitality outside the Orangery on visits. Thank you to everyone who responded. The overwhelming feedback was that this would be a positive step. As a result we have updated our Dynamic Risk Assessment and sent it to local Public Health for approval – this is an important step to ensure compliance for CQC and insurance purposes. Subject to approval, we hope to introduce the additional service from next Tuesday 8th June. The following week the outside area will be unavailable on a couple of days while the maintenance team are doing some work to improve the area.

There are five key steps for all visiting:

1. List of up to 5 designated visitors (and 2 for inside room visits) emailed to reception (reception@mhrv.co.uk)
2. All visits must be booked at least 24 hours in advance through reception (except end of life/exceptional visiting which can be booked through the care service)
3. Where a rapid test (LFT) is required, test must be completed in advance of visit either on site (test station or in car) or can be done at home on same day (registration confirmation sent or shown to reception before visit can start)
4. On arrival all visitors must check into reception first and let reception know of any changes to circumstances
5. Each visit is for a set start and finish time

This procedure must be followed in order to meet Government Care Home Guidance and agreement with local Public Health Officials/CQC. If visitors do not abide by the guidelines and procedure, we reserve the right to restrict or suspend visits for that resident.

As there are a number of visiting options with different requirements, we have attached an updated visiting grid to show how each visit should work.

We expect that there should be some revised government care home guidance later this month in line with the government road map.

If you have any queries or suggestions as we move forward, please let us know. In the meantime, thank you for your support and encouragement.

Best wishes

Jeremy Walford
Executive Chairman

49. Care Services – Covid update (26th May 2021)

The pandemic news over the weekend confirmed that both Pfizer and AstraZeneca vaccines appear to be working against the Indian variant after two doses (but are not very effective after one dose). The variant is now spreading rapidly in a number of areas of the UK including Bolton, Blackburn, Kirklees, Bedford, Burnley, Leicester, Hounslow and North Tyneside. The vaccine effectiveness would suggest that the UK should avoid a third wave, unless another variant comes along that is resistant to the vaccines.

Locally, infection levels are reasonably low, apart from Middlesbrough where the levels have increased again. Most encouraging is the number of Covid deaths in care homes nationally that has fallen to the lowest level since the beginning of the pandemic.

We have had a number of queries since the end of last week about the implications of the lockdown easing for care home guidance. At present, the restrictions for the overall population are at odds with those for care homes – for example, although everyone else can go inside a restaurant or eat socialise inside someone else's house, care home residents are not able to without self-isolating on return for 14 days. While understanding that care home residents are the most vulnerable to Covid-19, this is now unhelpful as we try and make life easier for residents and families.

Given the spread of the Indian variant, we anticipate that the guidance may not free up until at least June 21st.

We are asking care services residents and families for feedback about what they would like from visiting over the next few weeks, to see what we are able to do.

Orangery

Care services residents can use the Orangery between 2.15pm and 4pm Tuesday to Sunday – different care services can now use the Orangery at the same time.

We would like to consult residents and families about the possibility of nominated visitors being able to use the area outside the Orangery (following a rapid test) with residents from next week, so that we can ask for clarification/approval under our dynamic risk assessment if needed. Please email if you either feel we should remain cautious (and wait until later in June) or would be in favour of extending visiting in this way sooner. Please reply to this email by the end of the week if you have any distinct preference.

We are planning to make some changes to the area outside the Orangery so it works better for outside eating and drinking.

Nominated visitors are now able to visit residents in their rooms rather than the designated visitor room with PPE and after a rapid test, if the visitor has had both vaccines (and is not from one of the Indian variant areas). Visitors who have not had both vaccines, can either use the designated visiting room, have an outside visit or use the pod. We are asking visitors who take residents round the grounds (after a LFT) to wear a face mask but no longer apron and gloves if they would prefer not to, but remind everyone to wash their hands and use alcohol hand gel. If they are then going inside, they would have to don gloves and apron.

Residents are able to visit residents in other services (but not yet with visitors).

Please let reception know if you have any questions.

Thank you for your patience and endurance.

Best wishes

Jeremy Walford
Executive Chairman

48. Care Services – Covid update (20th May 2021)

While Monday has seen the latest step in the government's road map with further easing of restrictions, the news over the last week of the Indian variant is clearly causing concern. Although this variant appears to be far more transmissible, the evidence so far suggests that the vaccine is effective against this strain of the virus.

In terms of the lockdown easing, this week has seen significant changes:

- Groups of six people or two households can meet inside
- Outside groups of 30 can meet up
- Pubs, restaurants, hotels, theatres, museums can re-open
- Inside exercise classes and sports stadium crowds
- Greater personal judgement about social distancing
- People are able to go on holiday to a few "Green" list countries

[Covid: What's the roadmap for lifting lockdown? - BBC News](#)

At Middleton Hall, this means that the Orangery is now open inside for groups of 6 or 2 households, inside exercise classes can re-start and we are going to try outside coffee mornings for Middleton Wood and The Waterside.

Care Services – Visiting

There has been a further welcome relaxation of guidance for visiting. Each resident is able to have up to five nominated visitors as well as "out of the care service visits".

Nominated visitors still need to take a rapid test (or show evidence of a home test on the day of the visit). To make visiting more flexible, from next week we are planning to widen the way visits work for visitors who have had both vaccines (as long as they are not from an area with high levels of Indian variant such as Greater Manchester). Under the revised guidance, residents can have two visitors each day. With the level of organisation required, we are maintaining guidance that visits should be for one hour to make sure we have availability for as many residents as possible.

Residents are able to go out with nominated visitors including to family gardens (but not inside apart from use of a WC). We would suggest that everyone applies some common sense to this and avoids visits out with non-vaccinated household members and take care travelling in a car (keep a window open).

Central Facilities

The Orangery is now open inside as well as on the terrace outside (Tuesday to Sunday). This will include Sunday lunch this week for the first time this year.

We hope to continue moving forward with less restrictions during May and June.

Best wishes

Jeremy Walford
Executive Chairman

47. Care Services – Covid update (7th May 2021)

Since February 2020, Middleton Hall has taken a cautious, safety first approach, aiming to prioritise looking after our residents and our Co-owners. Given many of the uncertainties and dangers of Covid-19, this has meant that we have managed to navigate an often twisting and difficult path around the worst of the pandemic. It has been challenging for our Co-owners and especially our residents and families as well as being costly for our business.

Having discussed the pandemic with a scientist at Imperial College at the weekend and listened to Professor Neil Ferguson's Radio 4 interview on Tuesday, both spoke with a considerably more hopeful tone. My scientist friend that works at Imperial told me last summer what he expected to happen with a second wave in the winter. Sadly, he was proved correct about the winter, so I found his new sense of optimism very encouraging.

As a result, we have discussed at this week's contingency meeting that our strategy moving forward should reflect a more positive approach. Obviously, we will continue to work within government guidance and react quickly to any local or national concerns, but our focus now should be to gradually return to the core strengths of Middleton Hall Retirement Village as a thriving community.

We must still maintain precautions and safety but focus equally on resident lifestyle.

Visiting

The government has announced the welcome news that care home residents will be able to go out with staff or their two nominated visitors (following a rapid test on the day). The guidance allows a resident to visit public spaces or a private garden, but not inside someone's house – in line with government restrictions for all of us. The resident also has to have a rapid test before leaving.

The nominated visitors will be able to show evidence of a rapid test done at home on the same day as their visit rather than having to test at Middleton Hall. Any visitors choosing not to test at Middleton Hall should email confirmation of their test registration to Reception before coming in.

Community Activities

We are aiming to restart some of the cross-community groups and clubs from next week. For the moment, these will be restricted to residents within the care services (not Middleton Woods or the Waterside residents) under government restrictions but we hope to be able to widen this to Independent Residents during the summer. These groups could include Crafts (Knitting etc), Art and Current Affairs. Please let us know what groups you would be interested in – including some new ideas.

Residents who are able to maintain social distance should also be able to visit friends in other care services from next week.

Central Facilities

Currently, we are operating a food and drink service outside the Orangery.

We are expecting to re-open the Orangery for inside hospitality after the next government announcement on 17th May. This will include a Sunday lunch service for Independent residents.

We are now entering a positive period of re-opening services and facilities. In doing so, we will play our part so far as government restrictions and applying common sense about risk to ensure everyone stays safe.

Thank you for your continued patience and support.

Best wishes

Jeremy Walford
Executive Chairman

46. Care Services – Covid update (29th April 2021)

You may have noticed that there was no update last week. Essentially we decided that, as there was little to update, that we would not take up your time reading a bulletin without much in it. Indeed, this week there is little to add to the overall position. Infections locally remain low, particularly in the over 60s age groups which is increasingly hopeful for the summer.

If this situation remains, we will continue to open up facilities, visiting and resident activities with care and in line with government guidance. Our focus will be around Living Well for our residents after a very difficult winter.

The next stage of the government's roadmap is due to start from May 17th. One of the key areas will be around foreign travel. With the dreadful situation with variants in India and South America, we should hope the government are cautious about travel to avoid importing a variant that the vaccines are less effective against.

Visiting

We have been pleased to welcome more visitors over the last two weeks and warmer weather should help as we go forward to keep visiting safe.

Trips

We are starting some limited short trips out for residents in the care services from next week. Please encourage residents to take up the opportunities of going on trips.

Inside the grounds, the estates team have organised some picnic areas with tables and seating for residents only at this stage. Hopefully as restrictions ease, visitors will be able to use these areas as well.

Events

During June and July, we are planning to have a number of outside events for residents in each service. These may be small events for residents only, but we hope to have some bigger events where we will be able to invite some family or friends of residents as restrictions ease.

We are seeking ideas for events (afternoon teas, sports days etc.) that can be organised by each service. If you have any ideas, please let reception or the relevant Care Manager know by the end of next week so that we can start planning.

Tyne Tees

ITV have asked to film at Middleton Hall about our gardens and National Garden Scheme open days so are due to be on site at the end of the week.

I hope you will continue to receive fewer updates during the summer, as a positive sign of an easier situation.

Best wishes

Jeremy Walford
Executive Chairman

45. Care Services – Coronavirus update (15 April 2021)

On Monday 12 April restrictions in England were eased, and it has been wonderful to see our facilities re-opening, with residents and Co-owners making good use of our amenities.

Whilst there have been some encouraging statistics on infection rates we remain, as ever, slightly cautious. The impact of restrictions easing will be seen over the next few weeks, and it will be interesting to see the vaccine's effectiveness as more social mixing takes place. We have also received news of another local care home experiencing a covid outbreak at the end of last week. So, we will continue to proceed with care, to ensure the safety of our residents and Co-owners.

It is with pleasure that I can confirm that all permanent care residents have now received both doses of vaccine, providing reassurance for us all.

Visiting

Some residents have welcomed inside visitors over the last week or so which has lifted everyone's spirits and the brighter weather has meant a few more outside visits too.

As you will already know a rapid test must be completed, prior to an inside visit or walk around the grounds with PPE, on arrival at Middleton Hall. We have reviewed the process to see if there is a way for visitors to test at home, unfortunately current guidance dictates that this is not an option at present. There is, however, analysis being conducted by the government which may allow for self-testing at home. As information is released we will confirm changes to you.

Due to the number of visitors increasing, and the use of outside dining on The Terrace at The Orangery, we will begin from next week to allow visitors to test in their cars (as long as they have tested once at Middleton Hall at an earlier time). If anyone has any questions or queries on this process please speak with Debby, David, or the Reception team.

We have received several requests for our care residents to dine or meet for drinks at The Terrace at the rear of The Orangery with visitors from other services or with our independent residents. We have had to postpone these meetings as the easing of restrictions does not apply to care home residents. We do very much hope that if infection levels in the community remain low there will be lots of opportunities for friends and family to meet up in the coming weeks.

Welcoming new residents

In line with government guidance we are now able, in certain circumstances, to allow some isolation time to commence in another setting (hospital, care provider, own home) and end at Middleton Hall. This means that we may have new residents who complete only the last part of their isolation with us, allowing them to mix more quickly with other residents and make use of our facilities more swiftly.

Trips

The Living Well Team are planning for when trips can restart, reviewing locations and covid safety measures in place. We certainly hope that this can begin within the next couple of weeks.

Picnic Areas

As we are unable to venture far at the moment our Estates team are busy creating areas and placing benches for picnics throughout the grounds. These are for the whole Middleton Hall community to enjoy so if you would like to take some fresh air and enjoy a hot drink and something to eat, if the weather is warm enough, please speak with your Care team. (Maps will be available from Tuesday from Reception with locations marked).

As always, a huge thank you for your support.

Suzanne Graham

Managing Director

44. Care Services – Covid-19 Update (8th April 2021)

Local infection levels, although still well above national levels, are coming down (Darlington at 68 cases/100,000 and Stockton 89 against a national average of 28). Hopefully if this trend continues, it should allow a considerably easier summer. The concern now is what happens during the summer in Europe where infection levels are very high and longer term in Brazil where the P1 variant spread is particularly worrying as the current vaccines do not appear to be effective against it.

For Middleton Hall, our focus is to make the best of the relatively calm situation and safely improve the situation for our residents and families wherever we can.

Visiting

The government has announced that care homes can now have two designated people to visit residents inside who can visit together or separately from next week (as well as babies and toddlers under 3). We are asking residents and families to nominate a second inside visitor where they would like one. Babies and toddlers should only visit if they are not attending nursery. Inside visits can be conducted with less social distance to allow hand holding for example, but the current guidance still stipulates no hugging or kissing.

We are planning to make rapid testing easier once visitors are confident of the process, so that after one or two visits they will be able to pick up a test from reception and conduct and register the test in their car rather than coming into the Vision Room. To meet the test and trace requirements, each visitor will need to provide us with a photograph of the negative test as well as update any changes to the risk assessment on each visit.

Hopefully the weather will improve to encourage more outside visiting as well. From next Monday, this will include visitors being able to take residents around the grounds (after a negative rapid test).

We will still ask for all items brought in to be cleaned and disinfected in each care service before being given to residents.

Visiting professionals (opticians, chiropody etc), utilising a rapid test, can visit residents for specific concerns. Routine appointments should resume during May, subject to the government road map.

Re-opening of central facilities

The Orangery is open Monday to Saturday for outside drinks and meals as well as the shop from Monday April 12th. Middleton Woods and The Waterside from 10-2; Middleton Grove 2.15 to 3pm each day; Care Services 3.15 to 4pm (pre-booked only) each day. For the first week, this will be residents only and we will look to open it for visitors in due course.

Middleton Spa re-opens for single household bookings in the pool and gym from April 12th along with hairdressing. Karen will be working on Thursdays and Fridays for residents from the care services, organised by Michael and the Spa team. Only one service each day will have access to hairdressing and there are the standard hairdressing precautions in place, so it will take a little time to catch up. If you have any questions about hairdressing, please contact reception.

If you any other questions or feedback, please let Suzanne or me know.

Best wishes

Jeremy Walford
Executive Chairman

43. Care Services – Covid-19 Update (1st April 2021)

Locally, infection levels in Darlington, although well above national levels, are finally coming down. Further afield France has just entered a new national lockdown and infection levels in Europe are continuing to increase significantly. Previously, UK infection rates have followed high levels in Europe but with only essential international travel permitted, hotel quarantine and the UK's vaccination rate, we have to hope that we will not follow Europe into a third wave.

Visiting

We are keen to encourage safe and flexible visiting for residents as the situation hopefully continues to ease while meeting government guidance. From April 12th, we are planning (subject to approval by Public Health) to include visitors being able to take residents around the grounds with rapid testing. Given the number of choices for visiting, we have summarised the options on the grid attached with this email. If you have any questions, please let reception know.

If you are visiting, any gifts or items that you are bringing in for residents will be disinfected in each care service now rather than reception now (apart from Middleton Grove where reception will still deal with gifts).

New residents

We are beginning to welcome new residents into Middleton Hall. There are a number of steps we are taking to make sure that moving into Middleton Hall feels easy and welcoming as well as safe for our existing residents. These include Room Service during their first 14 days, use of Visitor Pods and additional support for family communication and Living Well during the first two weeks.

Vaccination

The remaining residents in Middleton Oaks waiting for their second vaccine have received it today.

PPE

We will no longer be requiring Co-owners to wear face masks outside unless they are going to be in close proximity to residents (2m).

Sport

We are delighted to have some of our outside sports facilities operating again. Bookings can be made through reception for the bowling green, boules and golf as well as outdoor exercise classes. We are asking residents to use their own equipment where possible but there is also selection of golf equipment available outside the pavilion with a sanitisation system in place and bowls are available to borrow on request. Toilet facilities are not available in the Pavilion at present.

Re-opening of central facilities

We will be re-opening Middleton Spa for single household bookings in the pool and gym from April 12th, subject to government guidance. We will also be re-opening hairdressing during that week. Further information will follow once we have received confirmation that Step 2 of the government road map is being put in place on April 12th.

Should anyone be wondering, there are no April Fools' Day elements in this week's bulletin. I gather that the news report that a Japanese airline is offering meals in grounded planes (at £392 per meal) is actually true, although the BBC report of the bronzed statue of Dominic Cummings in Barnard Castle would appear to be less than factual!

I know many residents and families are feeling pretty weary after a year of major restrictions on all our lives. It does appear we are near the end of a very difficult year, but we will maintain caution as we gradually open up services.

With best wishes for a Happy Easter.

Jeremy Walford
Executive Chairman

42. Care Services – Covid-19 Update (24th March 2021)

Yesterday marked the anniversary of the first lockdown. Not many of us would have predicted that one year on, we would be in the third national lockdown. Although Middleton Hall has fared better than most social care providers during the pandemic, it has stretched us as individuals, families and as an organisation. 12 months ago we had limited & expensive PPE, no testing, no vaccine and little idea of how the virus was even spread so we are far better set up to deal with Covid-19 now and there is room for optimism looking forward.

Although Darlington has the highest infection rate in the north east by some margin, we understand that there were no cases among Darlington care home residents in the last week, so it would appear that vaccines really are working.

We will review the daily rapid testing for Co-owners next week, when residents have passed 7 days since the second vaccine.

Visiting

We are introducing the option of inside visiting for all residents (apart from Catkin House) from this Friday (26th March) to supplement Visitor Pods and outside visiting. After the situation we have had in Middleton Oaks, everyone will appreciate that the extension in visiting is not without risk but the risk is reduced by the second vaccine. If the government guidance is not able to be adhered to in a particular circumstance, everybody should be reassured that we will of course try to keep residents safe with precautionary quarantine and testing.

Option One: Visitor Pods – multiple visitors (from the same household or in line with lockdown regulations at the time) will continue without the need for testing. Booking as per current system through reception.

Option Two: Outside Visiting – families are able to book outside visits at the visitor stations set up. This should be for up to two visitors with self certified risk assessment form but visitors can choose not to take a rapid test as long as social distance is maintained. The visits can be conducted without social distance if families choose to have a rapid test, similar to inside visits. Bookings through reception.

Option Three: Inside Visits – there is a detailed process to meet government guidance:

- Families to nominate one designated visitor for inside visiting and inform reception
- Booking through reception – risk assessment questionnaire will be sent to family member to fill in and hand in on day of visit
- All visitors will check in at reception and have their temperature taken
- Visitors will be escorted to the Vision Room for the Lateral Flow Rapid test procedure (there are designated parking spaces close to the Vision Room if people would prefer). The process will take around 45 minutes as the test result takes 30 minutes and the visitor has to register their test on a mobile device provided
- Visitors will then proceed to the specific entrance to the care service where they will receive PPE (Surgical face mask, apron and gloves – provided by MH) and instructions before entering the designated room
- Each service has a designated, ventilated room where visits take place (unless residents already qualify for “exceptional circumstances” when they can be conducted in their own room/apartment). Visits are for up to one hour and the room is cleaned and sprayed after each visit to ensure safety of other visitors and residents
- When attending an inside visit we ask all visitors to respect the safety measures that we are required to follow including:
 - No hugging/kissing (hand holding is fine providing you keep gloves on).
 - Face mask and PPE to be kept on for duration of the visit

- Please do not bring any gifts/treats etc directly into the visiting room with you – please leave at reception for disinfection
- Please remember to remove your apron and gloves after your visit and wash your hands or use the alcohol hand gel

We understand that the government guidance and requirements for Test and Trace may seem somewhat onerous, but it is important at this stage that we follow guidance to be able to offer safe inside visiting. We hope that it will feel easier on subsequent visits and in due course the guidance may become easier.

Vitamin D

Vitamin D is now recommended as a supplement to reduce the impact of Covid-19. We have plenty of Vitamin D available in the shop for Co-owners and Independent Residents (having purchased Vitamin D privately for residents and obtained GP consent, they have now been provided by the Department of Health so we have plenty in stock!).

Sport

On Monday the bowling green, boules and golf are re-opening. Independent residents and care services can book sessions through reception and there is updated guidance to make sure it is safe. There is no general access inside the pavilion as the WC is being used for visitors and the pavilion for occasional meetings. We hope to see residents out enjoying some gentle sport as part of the easing of restrictions and returning to community activities.

If you have any general queries or ideas, please let us know.

Best wishes

Jeremy Walford
Executive Chairman

41. Care Services – Covid-19 Update (12th March 2021)

We appear to be over the outbreak in Middleton Oaks with all the Acorn residents testing negative this week and no further cases amongst Co-owners.

With schools re-opening and increased testing of children, the national reduction in infection rates has plateaued, although worryingly Darlington infection rates for both over 60s and under 60s have increased in the last week to well over twice the national average (and the ninth highest in the UK). Stockton also remains double the national average, so we would urge everyone to remain cautious. The situation in Europe with rising infection levels, lower vaccination levels and further lockdowns is of course concerning for this summer and raises the prospect of further variants.

Vaccination

Our residents (apart from those in Catkin House) have received their second vaccine today, after a postponement earlier in the week. Some of our Co-owners were able to have their second vaccine on this visit, although not all of those due.

The scientific advice tells us that maximum immunity is reached 7 days after the second vaccine (rather than 21 days after the first vaccine). Hopefully, the second vaccines will provide greater comfort for residents, families and Co-owners as we go forward.

Testing

For the moment, we will continue with daily rapid testing for Co-owners in the care services while case numbers remain stubbornly high in the area.

Visiting

We will start to widen inside visiting from next Friday, 26th March following the second vaccines for residents. As a reminder this increases the choices for visiting going forward:

1. Visitor Pods – multiple visitors (from the same household or in line with lockdown regulations at the time) will continue without the need for testing. Booking as per current system through reception.
2. Outside Visiting – families are able to book outside visits at the visitor stations set up. This should be for individual visitors at this stage but will not require a rapid test as long as social distance is maintained. Outside visits should be booked through reception and we will always leave the relevant visitor pod available in case of disappointing weather.
3. Inside Visits (or outside visits without social distance) – there is fairly strict government guidance on inside visiting. There only be one designated visitor for each resident and we will arrange appointments (once a week) where the visitor will have to do a Lateral Flow Rapid test which then has to be registered.

For the inside visits, there is a designated room for each service which is ventilated (so it may be slightly draughty). Full PPE (surgical face mask, apron and gloves) that we will provide for visitors must be worn. Hand holding is permitted in the guidance but not hugging.

If the designated family member books a weekly inside visit, they will still be able to book additional pod visits or outside visits during the week. For everyone booking an inside visit, we will be sending detailed information out on booking. Reception will be able to take bookings from Tuesday 23rd for dates from Friday onwards. We will be restricting numbers in the first week as we expect the testing, PPE training and procedure will take rather longer the first time, so some patience will be needed while we make sure the process works for everyone. Given what has happened in Middleton Oaks, we will be careful about how the inside visits work. The testing station will initially be in the Vision Room at the back of Orangery and there will be dedicated parking.

If you have any feedback or questions please let us know and we can all look forward to welcoming some visitors inside shortly.

Jeremy Walford
Executive Chairman

40. Care Services – Covid-19 Update (12th March 2021)

We appear to be over the Catkin outbreak in Middleton Oaks although we have had two further Co-owners test positive this week with laboratory PCR tests. The first of these results unfortunately took four days and consequently the second case meant there could have been contact with Acorn House (but not the residents) and although this is low risk, we have put some precautions into place in Acorn until next week. While not confirmed by Public Health England at this stage, it is likely that we have had the misfortune to have a “variant of concern” that has been very infectious, as there is increasing scientific evidence that the vaccine reduces transmission as well as illness for the other strains.

The Tees Valley continues to have a slower drop in cases for reasons that are not clear and infections still remain twice the national average. The map in the following article illustrates how the area stands out (Darlington, Stockton, Middlesbrough and Hartlepool are all currently in the highest 25 case rates in the UK):

[Covid-19 in the UK: How many coronavirus cases are there in your area? – BBC News](#)

With the South African variant being found locally, it is clearly important that we all remain cautious.

Vaccination

Our residents (apart from those in Catkin House) are due to have their second vaccine next Thursday. This will add a further level of comfort and help our plans going forward so far as visiting and re-opening facilities.

Testing

We are continuing with daily rapid testing for all teams in the care services while case numbers remain high in the area. We will be using rapid testing for nominated inside visitors as well – full details next week.

Visiting

The Pfizer vaccine offers maximum immunity 7 days after the second dose. Given the date for the second vaccine is next week, subject to clarification over the guidance about visitors post outbreak, we are proposing to widen inside visiting with full PPE 7 days after the second vaccine – starting the week after next. Those who already fall into exceptional circumstances, where we have made arrangements with residents and families will continue in the meantime along with Visitor Pod visits and outside visiting. We hope residents and families will regard waiting a little longer as being worthwhile to make sure the outbreak is over and that residents are as safe as possible. Please let us know if you have any concerns about this.

Visitor Pod and outside socially distanced visits continue to be very welcome. Hopefully, the weather will make outside visiting rather pleasant in due course.

If you have any thoughts, feedback or questions please let us know. For the moment, please stay safe.

Jeremy Walford
Executive Chairman

39. Care Services – Covid-19 Update (5th March 2021)

We have had a difficult week in Middleton Oaks with what is believed to be an outbreak from the South African variant of Covid-19. Thankfully, it has been confined to just one household and we have not had any infections in Acorn House, so once we receive results from PCR tests today, we will be relaxing the restrictions for the residents in Acorn. We hope that we are now through the worst of the outbreak.

The Darlington infection rate remains high and along with Stockton, Middlesbrough and Hartlepool remains in the highest category in the UK, roughly double the national average, so we need to remain careful, particularly until everyone has received their second vaccine. We also understand that there has been an increase in outbreaks in care homes locally.

Visiting

One of the visitors in a Visitors' Pod this week subsequently tested positive and is likely to have been infectious at the time of the visit. Had this been an inside visit we would have had a significant risk of another outbreak. The team had followed all our usual procedures in terms of disinfection, so there should have been no risk to anyone.

With the high local infection levels and outbreak in Middleton Oaks we will not yet be introducing widescale inside visiting. Under the government guidance revised yesterday, during an outbreak all inside visiting (except end of life visits) should be suspended. We are continuing with Visitor Pod visits and the exceptional circumstances visiting in the care services that are not directly affected by the outbreak.

We are re-introducing outside visiting next week, as we offered last summer. These will be at designated visitor stations with social distance, booked through reception. As before, if someone books an outside visit, we will keep the relevant Visitor Pod free at the same time, in case of inclement weather.

We are very disappointed that we are not yet able to introduce wider inside visiting for residents and families. We will continue to review visiting on a weekly basis.

Vaccination

We currently expect that residents should receive their second vaccine during week commencing 22nd March. After the experience in Middleton Oaks, this will be a very important step towards reducing restrictions for the care services.

I appreciate this has been a somewhat downbeat update amongst all the positive news of the national vaccination programme. We should remain optimistic about progress towards the end of the pandemic, but it is clear we are not there yet so should remain cautious.

Please keep yourself and your families safe.

Jeremy Walford
Executive Chairman

38. Care Services – Covid-19 Update (19th February 2021)

Unfortunately, we had a Co-owner testing positive in Middleton Oaks for Covid-19 with very mild symptoms yesterday. Given infection levels remaining high locally and still above national average, even with vaccination it is not surprising that someone has tested positive. In this case, the Co-owner had received the first vaccination more than 21 days before picking up the virus, so thankfully for her it should mean a mild illness only.

Although we feel the risk is low, we have put some precautions into Middleton Oaks as a result – with some residents isolating, inside visiting postponed and all the care team rapid testing again every day. We are keeping the Visitor Pods operating at this stage.

Given the efficacy of the first vaccine shot (89% with Pfizer which nearly all Co-owners have had) there will be at least 11% of our Co-owners who could still have asymptomatic or mild Covid following first vaccination. This is why we are maintaining a cautious approach even as, hopefully, the end is in sight.

Visiting

We have got a few inside visits agreed this week for specific residents where we have risk assessed that there would be a significant benefit to the resident. The Care Managers have designated specific rooms or areas in each service for those visits to ensure that the rooms can be fully cleaned after a visit. These visits are being conducted with full PPE and social distance – the Co-owner testing positive in Middleton Oaks demonstrates the importance of maintaining these precautions.

We will review this and keep it updated in line with government guidance. We hope that this will be the first step towards more flexible visiting once we know more about the government plans after lockdown ends.

Government Policy

We have asked through Care England and with the Primary Care Network that the interval between vaccinations is reviewed for care home residents to help move forward. We will keep everyone up to date on this. Currently our residents are not due for their second vaccine until the end of March or beginning of April.

We are also asking for guidance to reflect the vaccination position for care homes and retirement villages as restrictions begin to lift in due course.

If you have any questions or feedback, please let us know.

Best wishes

Jeremy Walford
Executive Chairman

37. Care Services – Covid-19 Update (12th February 2021)

Again, I am pleased to report there have been no infections or concerns about residents or Co-owners over the last week. The national vaccination roll out continues at pace so that we only have some of our younger Independent Living residents waiting for vaccination at present.

One note of caution about vaccination. I am aware personally of two older people who have had their first vaccine and subsequently tested positive at least four weeks after their first vaccine. In both cases they have been unwell with Covid-19, although not seriously ill. Although this may be coincidence, it is worth us all being aware that caution is still needed after vaccination – particularly for our residents and Co-owners who have only had the first jab.

On a more optimistic note, the news from Israel this week was very encouraging – around 30% of the population has had at least one vaccination and they are now seeing infection levels coming down significantly. With the current lockdown and vaccine progress, we should remain hopeful about the UK in the spring.

Visiting

Now that Middleton Hall's residents are over 21 days since their first vaccine, we have gained agreement from CQC (Care Quality Commission) about very limited but more flexible visiting that conforms to government guidance and crucially lockdown regulations. For specific residents who struggle with Visitor Pod visits or where we have assessed that there would be a significant benefit from an inside visit, we are able to introduce some restricted, inside visiting with risk assessment for a few designated residents from next week:

- This can only be for residents who find Visitor Pods difficult for specific hearing, sight or cognitive reasons or where we have identified that a resident's mental health is being unduly affected by only having Visitor Pod visits. Any such visits would then involve:
 - Strict use of PPE and social distance for a visitor
 - Restricted to one or two designated visitors for a resident (with one visitor per week per individual resident)
 - Only while there are no positive cases among residents or Co-owners
 - Visitors will need complete a questionnaire in advance, do a Lateral Flow rapid Test (even if they are vaccinated) by appointment in our dedicated room and enter by a set route. On each visit, there will be clear guidance that will be explained to the visitor
 - Residents who qualify must be agreed between Debby Lamont and the Care Manager for each service, based on individual resident needs assessment. Appointments would then be made through Reception who will coordinate the testing with the help of the Front of House team

We will speak individually with the resident and families where we believe a resident could qualify. We appreciate that this still seems very restrictive, but we need to operate in line with government guidance and have had to agree with it being very limited to be able to offer it at all. If we can demonstrate that we can make this work safely, it will give us a better chance of being able to extend it, so please be patient.

We will review this after two weeks and keep it updated in line with government guidance. Hopefully this will be just the first step towards more flexible visiting when lockdown eases and with greater levels of vaccination.

As you will be aware from our announcement on Monday about our new Managing Director, Suzanne Graham, I will continue to lead Middleton Hall's efforts through what we hope will be the last stages of the pandemic.

Thank you for your continued support and positive feedback for our Co-owners.

Jeremy Walford
Executive Chairman

36. Care Services – Covid-19 Update (5th February 2021)

As a sign of progress, there was insufficient news for an update last week. This week has seen significant progress with the UK vaccination programme (and some mixed messages over intervals between vaccines and the suitability of different vaccines for over 65s from Europe). I am sure you will have read the news about the various variants, so I am not going to try and explain the science or the implications for Middleton Hall. There are some questions over the efficacy of the vaccine for these new variants, but we should remain optimistic about vaccines eventually bringing the pandemic to a close.

Outbreaks in care homes appear to have reduced since vaccination, so there are hopeful signs. The most significant news of the last few days has been a study suggesting that the Oxford vaccine does reduce transmission. This is potentially very good news, albeit expected.

We have continued to have a calm period with no infections among Co-owners or residents. All but one of our care service residents are over 21 days from their first vaccine shot and over 160 of our Co-owners have had at least their first jab. Our younger independent living residents in their 70s are now being vaccinated, so we are in sight of the whole retirement village being protected by at least the first inoculation.

We are making some adjustments to move towards all our team dealing with residents being vaccinated. Anyone applying for a job at Middleton Hall now will have to commit to being vaccinated before starting, in the same way everyone has a DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) check.

Testing

Given our very high uptake of vaccination, we have stopped rapid testing for all Co-owners who are vaccinated except for Acorn House in Middleton Oaks, where there is one resident under 21 days since vaccination. All Co-owners must continue their weekly PCR care home test.

Visitors

We have asked the local Director of Public Health and CQC to clarify the position on visiting. There has been an update to Government guidance around visiting which appears to give greater flexibility for us to determine visiting policy with “dynamic” risk assessment. We hope to be able to update everyone on this next week.

Living Well

It has been 11 months since our residents have had various restrictions, inconvenience and of course huge anxiety living through a global pandemic. Although we would hope that their lives should start to return to normality in due course, now they are vaccinated we are aiming to focus on how we can help improve their day to day living. If anyone has any ideas about how we can help residents, please let us know.

For the moment, please stay safe and patient.

Jeremy Walford
Executive Chairman

35. Care Services – Covid-19 Update (22nd January 2021)

Despite vaccine progress, this feels like a time for continued caution during what we all hope should be the last stage of the pandemic. There has been sobering news from other retirement villages and care homes in the last week as well as some terrible national figures. You may have seen the number of deaths in care homes doubled in early January to the highest level since last May and has risen since. This is partly due to the “new” strain of Coronavirus that is far more infectious. I have been told by a number of people in both retirement villages and care homes who experienced outbreaks in the first wave and again recently with the new strain, that if the new strain gets in, it is very hard to control despite best practice with PPE and infection control.

There has also been a report from Israel (where there has been the fastest roll out of the vaccine in the world) questioning the UK decision to delay the second dose from their own study that suggests people are not safe until they receive the second dose.

As evidence of this, I have also been in touch with a care home in the Midlands who has had a major outbreak since vaccination – 50% of their residents affected and sadly with fatalities. It appears to have started about 7 days after vaccination and they believe that some residents developed Covid well after 14 days from the first vaccine. If this is the case, it is especially worrying.

It is clear that we cannot relax yet. Although local infection levels have stabilised, we have had one unvaccinated Co-owner test positive this week who is now unwell with Covid-19 resulting in some precautionary restrictions on one floor of Middleton Court. We also have some Co-owners self-isolating as a precaution, due to family contacts with positive cases, even when they are vaccinated. Until we know about transmission after vaccination, we will maintain our safety first approach.

Given the increased risk, we are putting in precautions to reduce risk with the few Co-owners who have chosen not to have the vaccine to ensure they do not pose a risk to residents, Co-owners or in due course visitors.

Learning from other care homes, we now feel that we should remain cautious and wait 21 days after the first vaccination and only when all Co-owners are vaccinated before encouraging residents to socialise without social distance.

We are hoping that once National Lockdown ends, we should be in a far better position so far as visiting and the services we can offer residents, assuming there are changes in regulations.

Thank you to all our residents and families for their patience during this phase of the pandemic. If you have any thoughts or ideas about how we can make improvements for residents, please let us know.

Jeremy Walford
Managing Director

34. Care Services – Covid-19 Update (15th January 2021)

Despite the infection levels around us, we appear to have had a relatively quiet week with no infections amongst residents or Co-owners. As you will be aware from the media, the last week has seen hospital admissions with Covid-19 across the country at the highest levels since the beginning of the pandemic and sadly the highest number of deaths. Infection levels locally remain very high but seem to have plateaued so we should hope that the grim news will start to improve soon.

As of this morning, the residents (apart from one in Middleton Court) in three of our care services (Middleton Court, Middleton Grove and Supported Living) are now more than 14 days since their first vaccination. This means they should be relatively well protected from being ill with Covid. It is not yet known what impact the vaccine has on transmission so, although the residents should be safe from serious illness, we are not able to reduce precautions yet and we still have some Co-owners waiting for their first vaccine who remain at risk. When we have a service where all residents and Co-owners are vaccinated, we should be able to lift some restrictions, however we will still have to follow government guidance during the national lockdown and, for now, that includes no inside visiting except at end of life.

The one change we feel that we can make now is to allow residents to mix more comfortably and without social distance in those three care services.

We have asked at national level through Care England and ARCO for updated government guidance post vaccination, particularly with regard to visiting. The expectation is that the position on visitors will not change during national lockdown, partly because there remains risk to visitors if there is still transmission post vaccine. We are keen to reintroduce inside visiting as soon as we are able but we will have to adhere to regulations.

Vaccinations for over 80s are being carried out at Feethams in Darlington. Middleton Woods and The Waterside residents are now accessing vaccines in the same way as we were not able to secure on site vaccination.

The resident in Middleton Woods with Covid appears to be over the worst of the illness and there have been no other infections so there are no restrictions (apart from national lockdown) in Middleton Woods.

It does feel as if we are getting closer and can start to plan for the end of the pandemic so far as Middleton Hall is concerned.

If you have any questions, please let us know.

Jeremy Walford
Managing Director

33. Care Services – Coronavirus Update (8th January 2021)

Vaccine News

I was very pleased to welcome the vaccination team this morning to deliver the Pfizer vaccine to the remaining residents in Middleton Gardens and Middleton Oaks. Having read the JCVI (Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation) report on their decision to lengthen the interval between doses to 12 weeks for both Pfizer and Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccines, it is clear that one dose of the Pfizer vaccine offers good protection but *only after two to three weeks*. I am aware of a number of care homes who have had staff contract Covid-19 a week or more after being vaccinated.

Our job now is to keep our care residents as safe as possible for the next two or three weeks at a time of very high infection levels. At that point, although there is no guidance yet, it may allow us to relax some restrictions. For the moment, we will maintain all our testing and PPE protocols rigorously.

The other good news is that the advice around allergies has been changed for both the Pfizer and Oxford vaccines so that the Co-owners (staff) who have been turned down for a vaccine should be now able to be vaccinated, unless they have had an anaphylactic response to medication. We have managed to get some additional Co-owners vaccinated today as a result and the remainder are going on to a list for a vaccination centre (rather than James Cook Hospital) next week. This is likely to be the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine.

We are waiting news on vaccinations for Middleton Woods and The Waterside and have asked for on site vaccination.

Infections

The resident in Middleton Oaks who has been self-isolating after a positive Covid test has had no symptoms and tested negative from a PHE test, so we believe the original test was a false positive. There are no other care service residents currently with either positive tests or symptoms.

The resident in Middleton Woods who has been ill with Covid-19, is still being cared for externally at home in her apartment. There are still two other households self-isolating in Middleton Woods and one in the Waterside.

It is clear how much the national lockdown was needed in seeing the local infection rates doubling in the last week and continue to increase, so we all need maintain great caution until the end of lockdown.

Thank you for your ongoing support. We will continue to work with our residents and families during 2021 and look forward to easier and happier times in due course.

Jeremy Walford
Managing Director