

Journal Pre-proof



Safe visiting is essential for nursing home residents during the COVID-19 pandemic: an international perspective

Lee-Fay Low, PhD, Kathryn Hinsliff-Smith, PhD, Samir K. Sinha, MD, DPhil, Nathan M. Stall, MD, Hilde Verbeek, PhD, Joyce Siette, PhD, Briony Dow, PhD, Ramona Backhaus, PhD, Reena Devi, PhD, Karen Spilsbury, PhD, Jayne Brown, PhD, Alys Griffiths, PhD, Christian Bergman, MD, Adelina Comas-Herrera, MSc

PII: S1525-8610(21)00234-6

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jamda.2021.02.020>

Reference: JMDA 3854

To appear in: *Journal of the American Medical Directors Association*

Received Date: 11 February 2021

Revised Date: 18 February 2021

Accepted Date: 19 February 2021

Please cite this article as: Low L-F, Hinsliff-Smith K, Sinha SK, Stall NM, Verbeek H, Siette J, Dow B, Backhaus R, Devi R, Spilsbury K, Brown J, Griffiths A, Bergman C, Comas-Herrera A, Safe visiting is essential for nursing home residents during the COVID-19 pandemic: an international perspective, *Journal of the American Medical Directors Association* (2021), doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jamda.2021.02.020>.

This is a PDF file of an article that has undergone enhancements after acceptance, such as the addition of a cover page and metadata, and formatting for readability, but it is not yet the definitive version of record. This version will undergo additional copyediting, typesetting and review before it is published in its final form, but we are providing this version to give early visibility of the article. Please note that, during the production process, errors may be discovered which could affect the content, and all legal disclaimers that apply to the journal pertain.

© 2021 Published by Elsevier Inc. on behalf of AMDA -- The Society for Post-Acute and Long-Term Care Medicine.

Safe visiting is essential for nursing home residents during the COVID-19 pandemic: an international perspective

Lee-Fay Low PhD^a
Kathryn Hinsliff-Smith PhD^b
Samir K. Sinha MD, DPhil^{c,d}
Nathan M. Stall MD^{c,d}
Hilde Verbeek PhD^e
Joyce Siette^f PhD
Briony Dow PhD^g
Ramona Backhaus PhD^e
Reena Devi PhD^{h,i}
Karen Spilsbury, PhD^{h,i}
Jayne Brown, PhD^b
Alys Griffiths PhD^{h,j}
Christian Bergman MD^k
Adelina Comas-Herrera MSc^l

^aUniversity of Sydney, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia

^bDe Montfort University, Leicester, United Kingdom

^cNational Institute on Ageing, Ryerson University, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

^dUniversity of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

^eMaastricht University, Maastricht, Limburg, Netherlands

^fMacquarie University, Macquarie Park, New South Wales, Australia

^gNational Ageing Research Institute, Melbourne, Victoria Australia

^hNICHE-Leeds, Leeds, United Kingdom

ⁱUniversity of Leeds, Leeds, United Kingdom

^jLeeds Beckett University, Leeds, United Kingdom

^kVirginia Commonwealth University, Richman, Virginia, USA

^lLondon School of Economics and Political Science, London, United Kingdom

Funding: This work was supported by International Long-term Care Policy Network (ILPN) and Care Policy and Evaluation Centre (CPEC) at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). Lee-Fay Low is supported by the Australian National Health and Medical Research Council (grant 1135705). Nathan Stall is supported by the Department of Medicine's Eliot Phillipson Clinician–Scientist Training Program and the Clinician Investigator Program at the University of Toronto, the Canada Graduate Scholarships-Master's Program award, and the Vanier Canada Graduate Scholarship.

Word count (main text): 750

References: 7

1 **Safe visiting is essential for nursing home residents during the COVID-19 pandemic: an**
2 **international perspective**

3 Blanket and total bans of nursing home visitors were widespread at the beginning of the
4 COVID-19 pandemic when governments and homes were unprepared to prevent and
5 manage outbreaks. However, these visitor restrictions have been prolonged and often
6 reinstated after having been lifted, despite increased home and health system readiness
7 and mounting evidence of harms to residents. Further, in most nursing homes, visitor bans
8 were introduced without discussion or consent from residents or their advocates,
9 constituting a violation of the resident's rights to have visitors¹.

10 Our recently published literature review identified evidence that total visitor bans and
11 visitor restrictions have had negative impacts on residents, family and friends, and emerging
12 evidence of negative impacts on staff². Specifically, research reported increases in
13 loneliness, mood disorders, behavioural symptoms related to dementia and resulting
14 increased antidepressant and antipsychotic prescription, as well as loss of function for
15 residents. Additionally, families described increased negative emotions such as guilt, fear,
16 stress and worry about their loved one. Staff experienced additional workload and burnout,
17 though it is not possible to attribute these solely to visitor restrictions and lack of family
18 supporting daily care and emotional needs of residents.

19 A Dutch study³ and editorial from Hong Kong⁴ suggest that if safe visiting procedures are
20 followed when there is low community transmission, visitors do not bring COVID-19 into
21 nursing homes. There are no data on whether visitors increase the risk of nursing home
22 outbreaks when there are higher levels of community transmission. The Centers for
23 Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) September 2020 memo specifies that to reopen to

24 visitors, the county's test positivity rate should be <10% (i.e. less than 10% of all SARS-CoV2
25 tests conducted are positive)⁵. However our scan of international practices of when homes
26 were permitted to reopen to visitors found wide variability and no consensus on the level of
27 community transmission that is safe for reopening². Furthermore, community transmission
28 data may not be accurate if testing is restricted (e.g. only to symptomatic people or if there
29 is a fee for testing) or not widespread.

30 We recommend that blanket visitor bans not be reinstated by governments or individual
31 nursing homes. A policy against blanket visitor bans has been introduced in the Netherlands
32 and the World Health Organization's updated infection prevention and control guidance
33 asks homes to provide criteria and considerations for safe visiting⁶. In the UK the Joint
34 Committee on Human Rights has indicated that new laws are required to ensure meaningful
35 visits are reinstated for all residents.

36 We recommend that every resident have at least one designated caregiver essential to that
37 resident's daily care and/or wellbeing. Essential caregivers should be permitted to visit even
38 if general social visits are restricted because of high levels of community transmission or
39 COVID-19 nursing home outbreaks. Examples of jurisdictions which allow essential caregiver
40 visits even during outbreaks are Ontario, Canada, Minnesota and Illinois in the USA and the
41 Netherlands. The frequency, length and other visiting conditions should be planned based
42 on resident needs and in collaboration with essential caregivers and staff. Essential
43 caregivers should follow safe visiting practices including screening, use of PPE, undergo
44 testing, and other infection prevention measures.

45 An emerging issue relating to safe visits is vaccinations. Almost all jurisdictions delivering
46 vaccinations to date have prioritised residents and staff. There is emerging evidence from

47 the USA that nursing home vaccinations may reduce transmission⁷. Germany and five
48 Canadian provinces are also giving high vaccination priority to essential caregivers. It is
49 plausible that once vaccination becomes more widely available some jurisdictions will make
50 it mandatory for nursing home visitors to have had a vaccination.

51 We recognise that governments and nursing homes face the difficult balance of protecting
52 residents and staff from COVID-19 while supporting resident, family and staff wellbeing and
53 work within ever-changing guidance and regulations. We stress the need to involve
54 residents, their advocates, families and staff in discussions around safe visiting. If someone
55 lives in the community, they choose the degree of risk that they are prepared to live with.
56 As the nursing home is the residents' home, they have the right to have a say around visitors
57 and to continue their relationships with people outside the home.

58 Our international consensus is that we need to urgently reopen nursing homes to visitors
59 safely and effectively with appropriate consideration of community transmission, nursing
60 home outbreak status, and the preferences of residents, families and staff. With innovation,
61 we can begin to tackle the other pandemic of social isolation and loneliness that has
62 accompanied COVID-19 and been devastating for nursing home residents.

63 **Conflicts of interest**

64 The authors have no conflicts to declare

65 **References**

- 66 1. Kusmaul N. COVID-19 and Nursing Home Residents' Rights. *Journal of the American Medical*
67 *Directors Association* 2020;**21**(10):1389-90 doi:
68 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jamda.2020.07.035>[published Online First: Epub Date] |.
- 69 2. Low L-F, Hinsliff-Smith K, Sinha S, et al. Safe visiting at care homes during COVID-19: A review of
70 international guidelines and emerging practices during the COVID-19 pandemic.
71 LTCcovid.org: International Long-Term Care Policy Network, CPEC-LSE, 2021.

- 72 3. Verbeek H, Gerritsen DL, Backhaus R, De Boer BS, Koopmans RT, Hamers JP. Allowing visitors back
73 in the nursing home during the COVID-19 crisis – A Dutch national study into first
74 experiences and impact on well-being. Journal of the American Medical Directors
75 Association 2020 doi: 10.1016/j.jamda.2020.06.020[published Online First: Epub Date]].
76 4. Chow L. Care homes and COVID-19 in Hong Kong: how the lessons from SARS were used to good
77 effect. Age Ageing 2020 doi: 10.1093/ageing/afaa234[published Online First: Epub Date]].
78 5. Centres for Medicaid and Medicare Services. Nursing Home Visitation - COVID-19. Baltimore,
79 Maryland: Department for Health and Human Services, 2020.
80 6. World Health Organisation. Infection prevention and control guidance for long-term care facilities
81 in the context of COVID-19, interim guidance. Geneva: World Health Organisation,, 2020.
82 7. Domi M, Leitson M, Gifford D, Screenivas K. Nursing Home Resident and Staff Covid-19 Cases After
83 the First Vaccination Clinic: The Centre for Health Policy Evaluation in Long-Term Care, 2021.

84