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# Guidance for Homeshare Organisations operating during Covid-19

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## Overview

This is intended as a guide only and has been produced by Homeshare UK and Shared Lives Plus, the national charity, for our members who deliver Homeshare services and to aid their partner agencies, existing customers and potential new customers. It is not government guidance.

**Disclaimer:** It is accurate to the best of our knowledge, but government guidance is changing rapidly, and there is no settled policy position on some issues. If in doubt,

seek relevant qualified advice. No liability is accepted for any losses or damages arising from following this guidance.

## Who is this guidance aimed at?

This guidance is aimed at Homeshare Organisations who facilitate Homeshare matches, where someone who needs a bit of support and companionship to live well at home, offers a spare room to a Homesharer who provides around 10 hours a week support and companionship. This is usually an older person or someone who needs a bit of help to be independent at home and the Homesharer is typically a student, key worker, or older renters.

This guidance is also available to potential new Householders, Homesharers and their families to see what framework and good practice our members are working within during the Covid -19 outbreak.

## Information for people living in Homeshares

Everyone should follow advice on hand hygiene. You can find a visual guide to correct hand washing here: <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/best-way-to-wash-your-hands/>

Households should follow the latest government lockdown guidance and should discuss the risk factors in their household with their Homeshare Organisation and keep them informed of plans. You can find the government national lockdown guidance here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-lockdown-stay-at-home#contents>

The Metropolitan Police have a clear list of what you can and cannot do depending on where you live in the country: <https://www.met.police.uk/advice/advice-and-information/c19/coronavirus-covid-19/>

Anyone showing symptoms can now access a test which you can do yourself at home or at a testing site. See <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/testing->

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[and-tracing/get-an-antigen-test-to-check-if-you-have-coronavirus/](#) to book your test. Results usually come back the next day.

If either you or the person you live with test positive for coronavirus, you should inform the Homeshare Organisation immediately. There is guidance issued by Public Health England (PHE) for individuals, families and informal care workers of what to do to maintain home care support safely, if they are advised to isolate themselves at home: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-providing-home-care>

Note that guidance from the home nations may differ. See below links;

### **Advice from the Scottish government**

<https://www.gov.scot/coronavirus-covid-19/>

### **Advice from the Welsh government**

<https://gov.wales/coronavirus>

### **Advice from the Northern Irish government**

<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/coronavirus>

## **Maintaining and supporting existing Homeshare households**

Homeshare organisations can work to maintain and support existing households by;

- Prioritising support to those households that wish to remain together during and following the lockdown period.
- Identifying Homeshare households where there are particular risks, including those where either party is in an at-risk group.
- Working with family members, support networks and any professionals involved to put plans in place in the event of changes to services. This includes domiciliary care visits, trips to day centres ending, no family visits and collecting shopping and medicines.

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- Ensuring you have plans and agreements in writing to support any changes to the support provided
- Recommending increased cleaning activity to reduce risk of retention of the virus on hard surfaces, and keeping property properly ventilated by opening windows whenever safe and appropriate.
- Connecting Householders and Homesharers to offers of help from community organisations. Ask Householders and Homesharers what they are most concerned about and the pressures on their household: support them or connect them to sources of support to reduce anxiety, stress, and pressure in their households. Some pressures will be cumulative if self-isolation extends into a long period: these should be discussed and reviewed regularly. Lack of information or contact can increase anxiety.

## **In the case of a person testing positive for coronavirus**

If the Householder or any other household member has symptoms of COVID-19, the Homeshare organisation must assess the risk to the health and wellbeing of all household members, before taking appropriate action;

- Where there is no way of avoiding providing care other than for the individual to be moved to a different care setting, the risks of doing this should be weighed against the risks of them remaining at home. For some people, the disruption or risk of a sudden move of care setting will be very considerable, however, the virus can be lethal to those in at-risk groups.
- Note that the individual's mental capacity and best interests will need to be considered, and that it is unlawful to remove someone from their family home without a court order (emergency legislation or regulations may adjust current practice for the period of the pandemic).

## **Covid-19 Vaccinations**

Many older people within Homeshare arrangements will have already received their first phase Covid-19 vaccination. The vaccine may not prevent you from catching and passing on the virus, but it is expected to reduce this risk. After receiving the vaccine, it is still important to continue to:

- practice social distancing.
- wear a face mask.
  
- wash your hands carefully and frequently.

You can find out more about what to expect after your Covid-19 vaccination here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-vaccination-what-to-expect-after-vaccination/what-to-expect-after-your-covid-19-vaccination>

Sharers have not been identified as a vaccine priority group, so are not entitled to a vaccine within the first phase. However, should Sharers have an underlying health condition they may qualify as one of the vaccine priority groups. More information about priority groups can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/priority-groups-for-coronavirus-covid-19-vaccination-advice-from-the-jcvi-30-december-2020/joint-committee-on-vaccination-and-immunisation-advice-on-priority-groups-for-covid-19-vaccination-30-december-2020>

## Best practice for making new Homeshare arrangements during Covid-19

There are thousands of older people living alone in isolation with many of their usual services and activities closed during the pandemic. **Isolation and loneliness can have crippling health impacts.**

Many older people are also isolating alone with reduced care and support packages due to pressures on the social care system.

Homesharers may be able to contribute to supporting those without complex needs, firstly by providing vital companionship to people on their own at home. They may also help to reduce the number of people who might need to go to hospital due to trips/falls and other incidents that might occur from being at home alone.

The approach we suggest Homeshare organisations take is:

- Risk assess each new client. Consider whether their needs can be met via Homeshare.

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- Continue to carry out all the necessary checks on both the Homesharer and the Householder.
- Utilise existing support networks and family members that are in contact to assist with home checks, introduction meetings and anything else you might have done in person if this isn't possible.
- If conducting home visits, try to maintain social distancing, wear face coverings and meet in the garden if possible.
- Ensure ways of communicating with Homeshare matches are agreed and accessible e.g. video calling.
- Ensure all parties involved in the Homeshare household and the wider support network are aware of the risks, have disclosed all relevant information and agree to the arrangement. E.g. carry out a full risk assessment considering all the key areas for concern. Consider, will the sharer be going out to work? Who else will be accessing the property regularly? How will hygiene be maintained in the shared spaces?
- Ensure you have plans in place with all parties involved should either party have Coronavirus symptoms.
- Consider drawing up Covid-19 specific clauses and terms in the Homeshare agreement to cover all eventualities.

## Responding to a crisis

The first step that a Homeshare organisation can take in a crisis is to identify and use spare capacity, for example you may have approved sharers that are now without Householders. Identifying this capacity and placing people on standby could be vital in providing continuity of care if there is a breakdown in a Homeshare arrangement as well as potentially responding to other unprecedented pressures in the public service system.

Homeshare organisations may also be able to accelerate matching processes where there is a need for rapid provision of short-term matching due to an arrangement becoming unsafe or breaking down. This should only be done with the complete consent and agreement of the individual themselves and their family.

If you are looking at cases where someone is being discharged from hospital, consider the following:

- Will people leaving hospital have been tested for COVID-19? What information will be provided about possible exposure to COVID-19?
- Will rapid discharge procedures allow for gathering adequate information about the person to enable you and the Homesharer to make an informed choice?
- How will the arrangement be paid for and at what rate and will this be in advance or arrears? (it could be covered by NHS funds)
- Ensure you are working with local authorities and other partners involved.

## Summary of additional checks in new matches:

- Are there any risks of the individual having been exposed to COVID-19?
- Does the individual and/or their family / advocates understand what is being offered, including its risks and benefits, and how they compare with available alternative choices?
- Have the needs, safety and wellbeing of the rest of the household been fully considered, and any risks identified and assessed?

## Where to find updated guidance

Homeshare UK and Shared Lives Plus will continue to review and update this guidance on a regular basis as the COVID-19 pandemic continues.

Shared Lives Plus is the UK membership body for all people and individuals involved in Shared Lives and Homeshare and is issuing regularly updated guidance to the Homeshare sector here:

<https://homeshareuk.org/coronavirus-guidance-for-householders-homesharers-and-homeshare-organisations/>

You can contact the Homeshare UK team;

- via email at [contact@homeshareuk.org](mailto:contact@homeshareuk.org)
- or call the head office number and leave a message and one the team will get back to you: **0151 277 3499**

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