

## **Refugees At Home Coronavirus Policy.**

### **Last Updated 21.12.21**

Coronavirus is a viral infection which causes symptoms similar to 'flu. Current advice suggests that infection with the virus leads to a mild to moderate illness for the majority of people. A small proportion of the population is at risk of becoming more seriously unwell. Those who are thought to be more vulnerable include the elderly and those with underlying health conditions as well as those from BAME communities and pregnant women.

### **Coronavirus and concerns about the impact on the work of Refugees At Home (RAH).**

**Refugees at Home have been adapting over the last 24 months to ensure as much as we can that placements can continue to be made safely.**

This policy outlines the general principles which will form our response to this uncertain and ever changing situation. **We will be guided by the official advice provided by the NHS and the Government, including devolved decisions from the four nations. This means there will be different approaches in each area.**

Employees and volunteers **cannot give advice** about the Coronavirus: hosts, guests, volunteers, referrers and home visitors will be asked to consult official NHS and Government advice when thinking through their own responses to possible exposure of the virus or the development of symptoms.

There is now different advice in different parts of the UK. This advice and these restrictions have been put in place by the authorities as a response to varying levels of severity. However, across the whole of the UK if anyone has symptoms or has been in contact with someone who has symptoms then they and their household should self isolate at home and do a test.

### **What is a household?**

For the purposes of hosting, Refugees At Home is working on the premise that a guest is part of a household. If a guest who is currently hosted needs to move, we will review our ability to continue support depending on the specific level of risk in the area and the hosts we have available. Use of public transport will be discouraged where possible.

It has been confirmed that people are able to stay away overnight from 'home' during a lockdown if they are homeless, seeking asylum, a vulnerable person seeking refuge or if escaping harm. Details can be found [here](#).

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Coronavirus restrictions had eased considerably across the UK and for the most part there are limited legal measures around peoples movements and Coronavirus. There are some exceptions which are detailed below. **The Omicron variant has seen the return of some restrictions, details of which can be found below.**

Refugees at Home will still be encouraging guests and hosts to practice social distancing and the wearing of face masks. Additional rules may be imposed on a placement by a host and Refugees at Home will ask that they are followed so long as they are reasonable.

Placements will go ahead where both host and guest are fully happy with any restrictions required for that placement.

England - [face masks compulsory indoors and working from home applicable](#)

Scotland - [Face Masks remain compulsory indoors and working from home applicable](#)

Wales - [Face masks remain compulsory in public places and vaccine passports for certain venues](#)

Northern Ireland - [The number of people who can meet indoors is restricted and vaccine passports for certain venue](#)

**Any further advice issued by the Government that is not detailed above should be followed. It is expected that further restrictions will be announced for the 2021 Festive Period. Refugees at Home will continue to make placements if further announcements are made but will also limit movements between hosts and guests as much as practically possible.**

### Vaccines and Testing

#### Vaccinations

Our guests are eligible for the Coronavirus vaccine and many have already had both doses. Not all guests will have been vaccinated when they need a placement.

We understand that some hosts will want a guest to have received the vaccination before agreeing to a placement. While we will encourage vaccine take up, we cannot enforce this. This may mean that we have to ask a different host about a placement. It is unlikely, but if we are unable to find a host willing to offer a placement for a guest without a vaccine this may result in us not being able to host that guest.

#### Testing

Some of our hosts have enquired about a guest having a test before starting a placement. This might be possible on occasion however it will depend on the individual referrer and their capacity to organise this.

It is reasonable to ask for a test to be done before a guest moves to your home. We will try to organise this with the referrer where possible. If you wish for regular tests to be taken during the placement please let us know. Tests for people without symptoms can be ordered [here](#) or can be collected from some pharmacies.

**If a test is carried out prior to someone moving into a placement, we cannot guarantee that they will not come into contact with the virus before the move takes place.**



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We fully understand and respect your wishes if you request that a test is done, however if a guest is at risk of imminent street homelessness we may have to ask another host. We will however make a note of your request and be sure to approach you with another guest just as soon as we can. Testing will also be conditional on the consent of our guests and we respect their right to refuse a test if they wish, which they may do for various reasons.

### **Symptoms of Coronavirus**

As Coronavirus is a relatively new virus we are still learning about it and there are new strains emerging. Some people may develop all or some of the symptoms and others may not develop any at all.

The main symptoms are -

- A new, continuous cough
- A high temperature
- A loss or change to your sense of taste or smell

You may also experience

- Shortness of breath
- Extreme fatigue

New variants are reporting symptoms of upset stomachs and runny nose but this is early information.

Advice can be found on the [NHS website](#)

### **Hosting**

We are open to new referrals and are working with our trusted referral partners to ensure guests fully understand the importance of continued measures.

Where possible we will try to find move on options for our guests if they need to leave hosting. It is possible that it will become more difficult to find suitable hosts for our guests to move on to. We will always do all that we can to help and will keep hosts and referrers informed of any changes to continued hosting.

**We are asking all hosts and guests questions specific to Coronavirus, symptoms and contacts in the lead up to placements.**

**As vaccine rates increase, we are no longer asking guests to self isolate when they move into a placement. However, if anyone in the household develops symptoms they should follow normal self isolation rules. If you would still like a period of self isolation for a placement in your home please do speak with the RAH team.**

**For current placements, hosts, guests and referrers will be asked to update RAH as soon as possible if they or anything they have been in close contact with develops symptoms.**

### House Rules

In addition to the required social distancing and hygiene rules, some hosts may have individual house rules, which we will ask guests to respect, so long as they are reasonable.

Guests should not move between their host's home and friends for long periods of time and overnight, unless this is something their current host is happy with. A guest should not be staying away from their placement for multiple nights a week.

We will ask referrers to ensure that guests are aware of the current policy advice. If a guest will not abide by these rules we will end the placement and will not be able to offer further hosting.

If a guest feels uncomfortable in their placement and are worried that their host is not practicing social distancing, we ask that they let their referrers know. We will try and find an alternative placement but we cannot guarantee this.

We **ALWAYS** depend on our referrers to ask appropriate questions of guests and inform us of any health conditions. We rely on this more than ever. We are asking referrers to talk to their guests about the virus, using a translator if necessary. Information about a guests health is shared with hosts.

### If someone develops symptoms -

If a host or guest develops Coronavirus or symptoms of Coronavirus, and either the host or guest asks for the placement to end, we will do all that we can to assist but must advise that **members of a household should self isolate together on the same premises.** We will not be able to offer further placements until the guest has recovered and is no longer contagious. If we are to offer further placements after this time, the nature of how the original placement ended will be shared with prospective hosts.

If a host asks that a placement ends because of concerns surrounding the Coronavirus but not because any one has the virus, we will do all we can to find a new placement. However this cannot be guaranteed.

### Home Visits

Home visits have had to revert to virtual only. As the transmission rates of this new variant appear higher we are asking that Home Visits take place via video call with a face to face follow up when it is safe to do so. This will be reviewed regularly.

Where a virtual home visit is organised, we will ask that home visitors visit in person in the future - when everyone feels comfortable with that arrangement.

Any questions that the home visitor is unsure about should be relayed back to the placement team so we can provide consistent answers for our hosts and home visitors.



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**Employees and Volunteers**

Much of the work involved in Refugees At Home is undertaken remotely so there is limited face to face contact between volunteers, guests, hosts, referrers and others.

Members of the placement team will work from home and additional support will be given by the Executive Director and Trustee Operations Group.

The Placement team and volunteer team can seek advice from the Executive Director and Trustee Operations Group should they have concerns or questions about how to deal with this situation