

Care Home Focus Group:

What is it like to live
and work in a care home
during COVID-19?

6

Local health
and social care
shaped by you

What is it like to live and work in a care home during Covid-19?

To understand the effects of the coronavirus pandemic on local care homes, Healthwatch Dorset carried out a project which aimed to understand the impact COVID-19 had on residents, their families and the staff supporting them.

We invited care home managers and staff from across Dorset to share their experience with us. We held an online focus group and carried out telephone interviews with six care home managers and staff in June 2020. The main themes that emerged from those discussions are as follows:

- It was difficult to access Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) during March/April – costs went up and care homes were often promised PPE that wasn't delivered. The situation is better now but care home managers still feel that access to PPE is an issue.
- Testing for COVID-19 has been really challenging. One care home had to repeat the testing for all staff and residents three times before they got results, as the majority of the results came back as void for their first two tests.
- Care homes have adapted new ways of engaging with residents and their families and friends by using Skype and Zoom, creating Facebook accounts, sending out weekly news by email, and holding 'virtual' concerts.
- The care home managers we spoke to felt that interaction with health professionals has improved; facetime with GPs works really well. However, it has been an ongoing battle to ensure that residents who went into hospital were tested for COVID-19 before they were discharged back to the home. Some experienced confrontational conversations with hospital discharge staff.
- Overwhelming support from the local community and their staff has really helped. Local businesses have supplied food and treats, schools have provided artwork and poetry, and care home staff have really pulled together to keep their residents safe.



What people told us

Here are some of the questions we asked with responses.

How are you, and the staff you work with, coping?

“Initially lots of anxiety and many of our staff were unavailable in the first few weeks, shielding or they had symptoms. Staff and residents wellbeing has been our priority, everyone’s been supporting each other.”

How are your residents/the people you look after and their relatives coping?

“We had to implement new technology, which worked well and is now our new normal. We created weekly newsletters that go out to families with video updates, which include how the residents are thinking and feeling, which have been really well received.”

“It’s been harder for the residents who are used to going out on their own, and residents who are hard of hearing find the masks difficult - it’s made it harder for staff to communicate clearly. But many of our activities have continued, cream tea in the garden, bingo etc, the good weather has really helped.”



What are the main challenges you have encountered? How could these be overcome?

“Staffing was an issue in the early days. We managed to cover with everyone really stepping up to take on extra shifts. PPE was a big problem, we were contacted by a lot of fake suppliers and costs rose from 20p to £1.50 for a mask. It’s been really time consuming and hard work to get all the PPE we need to be safe.”

Have there been any unexpected positive outcomes?

“Improved team working, more trust between workers. Video appointments with GPs have worked really well - because there has been the need to support one another, there has been a lot more patience and understanding from health care services.”

“There seems to be a better view of care homes in general. Our local community has reached out to offer support and encouragement.”

“Some of our residents with advanced dementia have benefited from how peaceful it’s been. They can find visits difficult sometimes, so they’ve responded well to the quiet.”



Who or what has been the most helpful throughout the pandemic? Any top tips you could share?

“Morale is really important at the moment so I’ve encouraged activities that keep staff and residents happy – ice creams in the garden, TikTok videos, quizzes and puzzles etc.”

“The response from our local community has been great, deliveries of food & gifts, notes of support, ear covers for staff etc. The wave of help was unexpected and really appreciated.”

“Our activities team have created more opportunities, bingo in the corridor, using outside space more, virtual concerts with residents’ requests and interactive storytelling online.”

“GP surgery procedures have changed for the better.”

Anything else you want to tell us?

“Waiting to see how Test & Trace will play out within care homes. Will staff have to isolate?”

“It’s been hard to keep up with all the information, difficult to tell what’s important and what isn’t. I’m trying to not focus so much on the constant news updates now, that’s helping.”

“One of our residents went into hospital in March, not COVID-19 related, and I had to fight for her to be retested before she was discharged. She tested negative when she went into hospital but was in a ward that then took COVID-19 patients, so I insisted she had another. We’re a small home and don’t have the space to shield – trying hard to keep the home virus free.”

“Starting in late June we will have controlled visits to the home (allocated parking & seating, temperature checks as precaution, etc). We’ve had a custom made screen fitted and will allocate four half-hour visits a day, so the area can be disinfected between each visit. It’s taking a lot of organisation, but will really benefit residents and their families/friends.”

“One local agency was sending staff between COVID positive homes and ourselves (a green home). When challenged, after we found out and sent the individual out of the building, the agency claimed he worked for two agencies so he must have been sent by another. But when we checked with the other home they confirmed the agency had sent the individual to us both.”

“The infection control grant that is being issued to care homes cannot be spent on PPE! We can use it for taxis for staff, bikes and bike storage for agency staff, but not PPE which to us is what we need to ensure good infection control. Mad!”

Acknowledgement

Healthwatch Dorset thanks all the care home managers and staff who shared their comments, and a special thanks to Sue Warr, Healthwatch Dorset Steering Group Advisor for all her help with this project.

Disclaimer

This report is not a representative portrayal of the experiences of all care and nursing homes, only an account of the responses received from staff who were willing to contribute confidentially at the time.

If you live in a care home, or have a relative or friend living in a care home, we want to hear from you.

What's it like at the moment? How are you coping, what's working well and are there any issues you want to raise?

We are independent of the local Councils and the NHS and will keep your feedback anonymous.

Contact us on 0300 111 0102 or visit our website [healthwatchdorset.co.uk](https://www.healthwatchdorset.co.uk).

Complete our online survey:

<https://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/CoronavirusHWD/>

© Healthwatch Dorset (published July 2020)

The material must be acknowledged as Healthwatch Dorset copyright and the document title specified. Where third party material has been identified, permission from the respective copyright holder must be sought.

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at enquiries@healthwatchdorset.co.uk

You can download this publication from [healthwatchdorset.co.uk](https://www.healthwatchdorset.co.uk)

Why not get involved?



healthwatchdorset.co.uk



enquiries@healthwatchdorset.co.uk



0300 111 0102



The Bridge, Chaseside, Bournemouth, BH7 7BX



HealthwatchDorset



[@HWatchDorset](https://twitter.com/HWatchDorset)



[healthwatch.dorset](https://www.instagram.com/healthwatch.dorset)