

### **Clarification from the director of Public Health on contact with elderly relatives and friends**

The current downward trend in daily positive COVID-19 cases shows that the measures introduced by the government have been successful in suppressing spread of the coronavirus. Stage 2 of the government strategy, 'Stay Safe', supports a controlled return to normality, balancing social, economic and health impacts in a way that is designed to avoid a significant rise in virus transmission and cases of COVID-19.

Despite the fall in number of positive COVID-19 cases, we know the virus is still circulating in our community. We still need to restrict the number of social contacts we have as much as possible through social distancing and continued restrictions on large gatherings and crowded venues such as restaurants, pubs and clubs. We still need to protect those most at risk of serious COVID-19 from catching the virus.

Older people, over the age of 70, continue to be at significant risk of severe disease if they get COVID-19. Whether they are living in the community or in residential care, older people are still advised to self-isolate as far as possible to avoid coming into contact with the virus. Care homes have significant restrictions on visiting to protect their vulnerable residents.

To continue to protect older people as we move to 'Stay Safe', the recommendations on self-isolation (at home or in a care home) remain in place. People are encouraged to stay in touch with older relatives and friends through phone and video calls wherever possible. It is still possible to have a face to face conversation with your loved one so long as you do not enter their home and you can maintain a 2 m distance from them. You can do this, for example, by visiting at a pre-arranged time and talking to them while they are at a window or doorstep and you are 2 m away in the garden or on the street. You were able to do this in the 'Stay Home' phase, but only if your loved one lived close by. Now, it will be OK to drive to where they live to talk to them as described above. It may not be possible to talk from street level to relatives or friends who live, for example, in an upper floor flat or upper floor of a care home but journeys for the purpose of waving to or phoning them while they can see you in the street/garden below will now be ok.