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Lifting of the general ban on visiting care facilities and integration aid on Mother's Day

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The Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Affairs has issued the following statement:

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The Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Affairs will lift the current general ban on visiting care facilities and integration aid on Mother's Day (10 May 2020). This will give residents the opportunity to receive visits from family and friends. This requires adherence to important safety measures, such as separate visitor areas, corresponding protective clothing, and screening of the visitors. Furthermore, people with disabilities will once again be able to attend their vocational workshops. In doing so, the Ministry of Health is following the central recommendations of an expert committee led by Dr. Markus Zimmermann (Hochschule für Gesundheit Bochum) specifically established for this issue.

"Among the measures for inhibiting the coronavirus epidemic, the general ban on visiting care and integration facilities was certainly the one that hurt the most. The people living there in particular have suffered greatly from the contact bans. I have always emphasised that when the situation allows for it, we must lift the ban as quickly as possible," explains Minister of Health Karl-Josef Laumann.

"For that reason, it is important that we allow visits while effective safety measures are followed. Because it is certain that the coronavirus is not the only major risk to the people affected. Social isolation can cause considerable mental and physical harm. That is why we must find the correct balance between effective protection against infection, and social participation," Laumann continues.

The expert committee led by Dr. Zimmermann stated in its report (available at www.mags.nrw/coronavirus) that under consideration of the Robert Koch Institute's (RKI) recommendations and adherence to infection protection measures, visits can and must be allowed once more.

"This not only fulfils the needs and rights of the socially isolated, disadvantaged and particularly vulnerable – it also protects the employees and residents who work and live in these facilities, respectively," says Dr. Zimmermann on behalf of the expert group.

Specifically, the new regulations for inpatient care facilities stipulate that visits can be made in separate, outdoor areas or spaces. With corresponding protective measures and protective clothing, visits can also take place inside the facility, such as in separate rooms or (in the case of bedridden patients) in the patient's room. Up to two people can visit the separate rooms. One person can visit the patient's room at a time. The visit is limited to two hours per visit and day for each patient.

Integration facilities are primarily inhabited by younger, less susceptible people, although they have especially high contact with their relatives. That is why the facilities must prepare openings that extend beyond those in the care facilities.

All visitors shall be registered and subjected to a brief screening during which, among other things, the visitor is asked about their own state of health and possible contact with Covid-19 within the last 14 days. This aims to reduce the risk of infected people, people who had contact with infected individuals, and people with cold symptoms visiting the facility. Visitors must also be informed of the required safety measures, and be supervised if necessary.

It is clear that the current recommendations from the RKI must be applied in all measures. The facilities, from inpatient care to integration, will now be informed of the specific implementation in order to be able to commence corresponding concepts and preparatory work.

Regulations in integration facilities that structure daily schedules for residents will also be relaxed for the residents as of 10 May 2020.

The workshops for people with disabilities shall also open up to more participants. Of course, the necessary safety precautions must be taken here, and the protection of participants' health is the top priority. The facilities can begin drafting plans for opening within the bounds of the RKI's recommendations for residential and care facilities as well as particularly vulnerable groups, and the SARS-CoV-2 labour protection

standards from the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (BMAS), while taking into consideration the circumstances in the region, the respective workshop, the employees, and the working environment, for example.

"I am pleased that we can take another step toward normality. People need familiar contacts and conversations," says Minister Laumann. "And I am also very happy with the unanimity concerning our approach with the health policy speakers in the state parliament."

Please direct enquiries to the press office of the Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Affairs, telephone 0211 855-3118.

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