

Virtual Home Environment Assessments

What is a virtual home environment assessment?

A virtual home environment assessment is a way for a member of the occupational therapy team to look at your home remotely, using a video call or photos. It helps us understand your home layout and daily needs so we can plan the right support, equipment or adaptations before you go home from hospital.

What are the benefits of a virtual home environment assessment?

- Helps plan your discharge sooner, with fewer delays.
- Avoids unnecessary travel or waiting for an in-person visit.
- Reduces risk of infection by limiting face-to-face contact.
- Feels less intrusive than having a practitioner visiting your home.
- Helps you and your representatives to stay involved by reviewing images together.
- Gives us a clearer picture of your home than verbal descriptions alone.
- Improved sustainability in our NHS services.

(Reed, 2020, Alty, 2020)

Limitations of virtual home environment assessments:

- We can only assess the information provided to us in photos or videos so important details could be missed.
- We may still need to complete an inperson assessment afterwards.

Why might I need this assessment?

A member of the occupational therapy team has identified that assessing your home is important to:

- Check for any safety risks.
- Identify challenges with daily activities.
- Helps decision-making and risk assessments for equipment or adaptations needed.
- Supports goals setting for your discharge home.

How does the virtual assessment work?

A practitioner will contact you (or your representative) to explain the assessment. They will have provided you with this leaflet and will explain: which areas of your home they need to see, if photos or videos are the most suitable, how to take measurements if required and how to send the information securely.

Which areas might I be asked to photograph?

The practitioner will guide you but this may include: the entrance and access into the property, bedroom, living room, stairs and bathroom. You may be asked to measure the size of the room, height of the chair, bed, toilet, and width of doorways.

What do I need?

- A good internet connection or mobile data signal.
- A device to take photos or join a video call





- An email account (for sending photos).
- A tape measure or ruler (if you've been asked to take measurements).
- Pen and paper.







A guide to taking photos:








General tips



- Use a smartphone or digital camera.
- Take photos in good lighting. Turn on lights or open curtains.
- Hold the camera at chest height (about 1.2-1.5 m high) to capture a natural view.
- Stand back far enough to show the whole space, ideally from the doorway.
- Take 2-3 photos per area to capture the whole space
- A closer shot of any important details (eg steps, bed and chair) including the whole piece of furniture and any legs or feet if able.

Below are some example photos to act as a guide on images that are helpful for the practitioner.

Room	Less helpful images	Helpful images
Front elevation		
Access / doorways		

Room	Less helpful image	Helpful images
Stairway	 <p>A photograph of a carpeted staircase with a wooden handrail on the right side. The carpet is a dark green color. The lighting is somewhat dim, and the image is slightly blurry.</p>	 <p>A photograph of the same carpeted staircase, but from a slightly different angle and with better lighting. The wooden handrail and the patterned curtain on the right are more clearly visible.</p>
Bathroom	 <p>A close-up photograph of a shower area. It shows a white shower pan, a shower head, and a pink sponge hanging on the wall. The walls are covered in a textured, light-colored material.</p>	 <p>A wide-angle photograph of a bathroom. It shows a glass shower enclosure, a white bathtub with a dark base, and a sink. The walls are covered in a textured, light-colored material.</p>
Toilet	 <p>A photograph of a white toilet in a bathroom. The toilet is the central focus, and the background shows a white wall and a sink.</p>	 <p>A photograph of a toilet in a bathroom with accessibility features. There are blue grab bars on the wall, a blue toilet brush holder, and a blue toilet brush. A yellow box is on the floor next to the toilet.</p>

Room	Less helpful images	Helpful images
Kitchen	 <p>A close-up photograph of a kitchen counter. On the counter, there is a white microwave, a black toaster, and a black induction cooktop. The counter is white, and the wall behind it is a light green color. The cabinets are white with black handles.</p>	 <p>A wide-angle photograph of a clean, modern kitchen. The kitchen features white cabinets, a white countertop, and a white refrigerator. The floor is a light green color. The lighting is bright, and the overall appearance is well-maintained.</p>
Bedroom	 <p>A photograph of a bedroom. A bed with white bedding is the central focus. To the left, there is a window with a view of trees. A small bedside table with a lamp is visible next to the bed. The room is well-lit and appears clean.</p>	 <p>A photograph of a bedroom, similar to the one in the 'Less helpful' column. It shows a bed with white bedding, a window, and a bedside table. The room is bright and clean, providing a more comprehensive view of the space.</p>
Living Room	 <p>A photograph of a living room. A grey sofa is positioned against a wall. In front of it is a light-colored wooden coffee table with a vase of yellow flowers. The floor is made of light wood. The room is bright and clean.</p>	  <p>Two photographs of a living room. The top photo shows a grey sofa, a coffee table, and a window with curtains. The bottom photo shows a different angle of the living room, featuring a brown leather sofa, a coffee table, and a dining table with white chairs. The room is bright and clean.</p>

Room	Less helpful images	Helpful images
Chair		

How to measure furniture:

It is important to measure furniture accurately and while it is compressed. You can send measurements in either cm or inches but please specify which. This means someone should be sitting on the bed or chair when measurements are taken. These photos show you how best to do this:



Toilet: measure the toilet from the floor to the top of the seat. This toilet is 17" / 43.5cm in height.

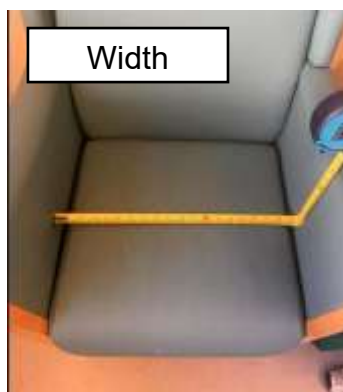
Chair:
Height: measure the chair from the floor to the top of the cushion when sat on or pressed down. It can help to place a ruler on the cushion to provide a marker. This chair is 18" / 46cm in height.
Depth: measure the chair from the back to the front of the cushion.
Width: measure the distance between the arms.



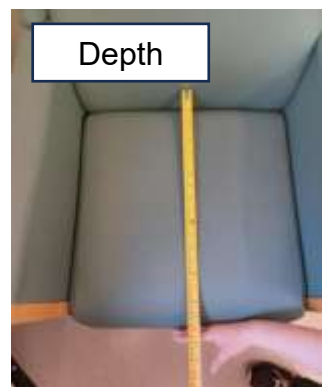
Height



Height



Width



Depth



Bed: Measure the bed from the floor to the top of the mattress when it is compressed, either by sitting on it or pressing down. This bed is 23" / 58.5cm in height.

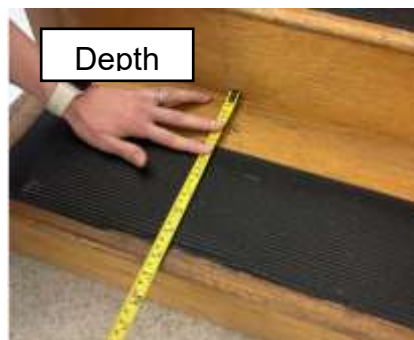
How to measure a doorway:

We may ask you to measure the width of a doorway from the narrowest part of the door. Make sure to keep the tape measure level and straight. You can send measurements in either cm or inches but please specify which. These photos show how best to do this. This door width is 30" / 76.5cm.



How to measure a step:

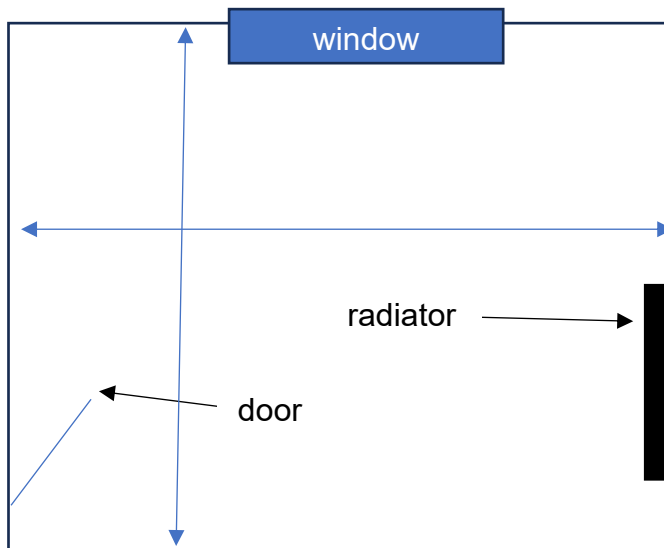
We may ask you to measure the height (vertical distance), depth (front to back) or width of a step. Make sure the tape measure is level and straight. These photos show how to do this accurately. This step is 6" / 25cm in height, 10.5" / 27cm in depth and 28" / 73cm width.



How to measure a room size:

If you have been asked to measure the room size it may help to sketch out the shape of the room as shown in this image below.

It can be easier to have two people to measure the room, and you will need a large hard tape measure. Measure from the skirting boards from one side to the other and make sure the tape measure is straight and level.



How to share the information with us:

Photos: The practitioner will tell you which email address to send photos to. Please attach the images and include the name, date of birth and NHS number of the patient. It is helpful to also add the patient's address. In the subject please write 'FAO {name of the staff member}'. Our email addresses are checked daily during office hours but you may not receive a direct reply.

Video call: The practitioner would have discussed this with you and made a prearranged time to meet via video call. At this time you will receive a text message from a NO REPLY number. Click the link in the message to join the video call. We use a system called Accurx. Be aware that this may require your IOS to be up to date and you will need good internet connection.

What happens after I have sent the information?

The practitioner will review the information and discuss their recommendations with you or your representative. They may arrange any necessary equipment or referrals. If the practitioner needs more information they will contact you.

Please note that the images will be added to your medical records with your consent.

Privacy and confidentiality

Any notes we make will be stored securely in your medical records. We follow East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust privacy, information governance, digital and data-protection policies.

Safety is important! If you do not feel safe or are unable to complete the measurements or photos, please stop and contact the Occupational Therapy team.

Useful contact information: Conquest: 0300 131 5181 EDGH: 0300 131 4500 x771068

Important information

This patient information is for guidance purposes only and is not provided to replace professional clinical advice from a healthcare practitioner.

Your comments

We are always interested to hear your views about our leaflets. If you have any comments, please contact: 0300 131 4784 or esh-tr.patientexperience@nhs.net

Hand hygiene

We are committed to maintaining a clean, safe environment. Hand hygiene is very important in controlling infection. Alcohol gel is widely available at the patient bedside for staff use and at the entrance of each clinical area for visitors to clean their hands before and after entering.

Other formats

If you require any of our leaflets in alternative formats, such as large print or alternative languages, please contact 0300 131 4434 or email: esh-tr.AccessibleInformation@nhs.net

After reading this information are there any questions you would like to ask? Please list below and ask your occupational therapist.

References:

Alty, A. (2020) The digital solution: environmental assessment for acute hospital discharge. OT News. June 2020 page 42 – 44.

Reed, J. and Jones, N. (2020) Occupational Therapy in a digital age. OTNews. June 2020 page 28 -30

The following clinicians have been consulted and agreed this patient information:
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The Clinical Specialty/Unit that have agreed this patient information leaflet: CHIC

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