

# Preventing Infection in Care

Infection Prevention and Control:  
Care Homes for Older People and  
Home Environment



## Outbreaks of Infection

Despite the best efforts of everyone involved, outbreaks of infection may occur, and whilst infections can affect people of all ages, older people living in care homes can suffer more severe illness and a more rapid deterioration.

When people are living in close proximity, infection can spread rapidly and more widely and staff and visitors and families moving between individuals can exacerbate this situation unless stringent infection control measures are in place.

An outbreak is defined as two or more cases which are experiencing the same illness associated in time and/or place or when the observed numbers of cases exceed the expected. This could be diarrhoea, vomiting or a persistent cough with or without a temperature.

An outbreak can also be identified through specimens sent to the laboratory, the results showing similar infections, for example a notifiable disease such as food poisoning or *C. difficile* infections.

Staff must inform your supervisor or the manager of the care home immediately, who should in turn inform the Health Protection Team to receive guidance on the steps to be taken to minimise the risk. Your care regulator must be informed as soon as possible – this is a legal requirement.

An investigation will be carried out by the local Health Protection Team to establish the nature and extent of the outbreak. It will also involve identifying those who are ill and the implementation of control measures.

It's important to ensure that those who are ill are receiving appropriate care and their relatives informed. Individuals with symptoms may be separated, where possible, from those who are well until symptoms have subsided.

Depending on the nature of the infection, such as diarrhoea and vomiting, staff, visitors or family carers may also be excluded from the setting if they develop symptoms and until they are without symptoms for at least 48 hours. The Health Protection Team will advise on the necessary procedures.

The care home must adhere to the guidance given by the Health Protection Team regarding control of the outbreak and follow the procedures necessary for the prevention of further illness. All visitors to the care home must be informed and asked to follow any special measures that have been put in place.

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From the start of an outbreak to when it is declared over by the local Health Protection Team, clear records must be kept. This might involve recording of symptoms in all individuals', staff and visitors; dates and times of when the illness started; and details on the collection and results of specimens.

## **To break the chain of infection:**

Remember:

- Recognise when someone might be ill with an infection that can spread to others
- Ensure that infection prevention and control measures are followed by all staff, visitors and family
- Be clear about the reporting systems for potential outbreaks
- Ensure that all information is documented for reference
- Following an outbreak it is important to reflect on how the outbreak was handled and any problems encountered. This will help everyone to improve their practice and may prevent infections in the future. It's also important to reflect on positive aspects – anything that worked well, and you may want to discuss with your Health Protection Team