

Outbreak Management:

A guide for residents, families and visitors



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In partnership with Public Health Sudbury & Districts, we are committed to protecting the health and safety of you and your family. A long-term care facility, or congregate living setting, is a high-risk area for the transmission of infections. As a family member or friend visiting our facility, we ask that you read this information to help reduce the risk of infection transmission and understand what happens during an outbreak.



What is an outbreak?

An outbreak is the occurrence of more cases of disease than normally would be expected within a specific place or group of people over a period of time.

Among the many types of outbreaks, two main types are of high importance in long-term care homes/retirement homes (LTCH/RH):

- respiratory (includes COVID-19 and influenza), and
- gastrointestinal/enteric.

Outbreaks of illness in long-term care homes (LTCH) or retirement homes can be stressful for residents, staff, visitors, and family members. For residents, however, outbreaks can be more than just stressful, they can be life-threatening. For the health and well-being of residents and staff, it is important to control and stop outbreaks as quickly as possible.

How will I know there is an outbreak?

During an outbreak, family members are contacted if:

- their loved one's unit is affected by the outbreak, or
- the entire facility is affected.

Before you visit

We recommend you call the facility prior to visiting to obtain more information, for example, about visitor policy and instructions on wearing personal protective equipment. Only visit the facility for essential reasons and, if possible, postpone visits if you are unwell.

During your visit

Follow the facility's visitor policy.

Check-in with staff as control measures may change during an outbreak. Staff at the facility will provide you with information on control measures that are being used at that time and help answer your questions.

Look for signage identifying an outbreak. Signs will be posted throughout the facility in the following locations:

- at the front entrance,
- inside the elevators, and
- on the door of any affected unit(s).

Check your loved one's door or bed space area. Precautionary signage will be posted if your loved one is affected by an outbreak.

If you see outbreak signage in the facility or on your loved one's door, speak to a staff member for instructions before entering.

Can family members visit a facility during an outbreak?

Visitors are asked to follow Infection Prevention and Control (IPAC) standards and facility policies. General visitors should postpone all non-essential visits to residents within the outbreak area for the duration of the outbreak.

Visiting a resident when you are not feeling well puts everyone in the facility at risk. Keep infants and children at home if they are not feeling well. Do not visit if you have a cold or are experiencing any of the of the following new or worsening symptoms:

- body aches
- chills
- cough
- diarrhea
- fever
- nasal congestion
- rash
- sore throat
- shortness of breath
- runny nose
- sneezing
- vomiting

Please speak to staff regarding visiting during an outbreak.

Get your COVID-19 and flu shots (influenza vaccine)

COVID-19 and influenza can cause serious complications such as pneumonia or death in the elderly population, particularly in shared living spaces like long-term care homes. You can pass COVID-19 or influenza to others before you start to show any symptoms. To protect yourself and your family, stay up to date with the COVID-19 vaccine (primary series and booster doses) and get your annual flu vaccine.

What is expected of me if I visit a facility during an outbreak?

- Stay home and do not visit if you are ill or have any of the above symptoms.
- Clean your hands. It is the best way to prevent the transmission of infection. Clean your hands using an alcohol-based hand rub (ABHR) or warm soap and water at handwashing stations.
- Wash your hands with soap and water if hands are visibly dirty. ABHR is preferred if hands are not visibly dirty.
- Clean your hands:
 - ▶ when entering the facility or a resident's room and when leaving,
 - ▶ before and after feeding a resident or providing care to a resident,
 - ▶ before eating,
 - ▶ after using the washroom, and
 - ▶ before putting on PPE or removing PPE.
- If a resident is ill or on additional precautions, ensure you are wearing the proper personal protective equipment (PPE) prior to entering their room. If you are unsure what PPE should be worn, or how to put

or remove PPE, speak to a staff member. Information about additional precautions and necessary PPE will also be posted on the resident's door.

- Before leaving a resident's room, who is on additional precautions, make sure that you:
 - ▶ remove any PPE using the appropriate technique,
 - ▶ discard the used PPE in the garbage provided inside the room, and
 - ▶ clean your hands properly with an alcohol-based hand rub.
- Please do not escort a resident out of an outbreak unit.
- Limit your interactions with others by:
 - ▶ visiting only one resident and leaving immediately after the visit,

Note: If both parents are in the home but in different locations, it is recommended that the healthy parent (not ill and not residing in the outbreak area) be visited first.

- ▶ only visiting residents in their rooms and avoiding communal areas, and
- ▶ avoiding mingling with other residents.

How long does a respiratory outbreak last?

- The length of a respiratory outbreak depends on the type of virus causing the outbreak and compliance with control measures.
- COVID-19 can last for 7 days or more depending on isolation dates and symptom onset of staff and residents.
- Public Health Sudbury & Districts advises the facility on when to officially declare the "outbreak over".

How long does a gastrointestinal outbreak last?

- Gastrointestinal outbreaks can last from five days to several weeks based on the microbe causing the infection and compliance with control measures.
- Residents are generally isolated for 48 hours after their last symptom resolves.
- The facility generally remains on outbreak status until 5 full days after the last ill resident starts showing symptoms.
- Public Health Sudbury & Districts advises the facility on when to officially declare the "outbreak over".

Why do residents have to stay in the unit?

During an outbreak, residents remain in their unit to prevent transmission of infection to unaffected residents and staff.

Get your COVID-19 and flu shot (influenza vaccine)



Why is the unit closed?

Movement in and out of the outbreak unit is discouraged in order to prevent transmission of infection. The residents in an outbreak unit may be incubating a virus and could possibly pass it on to others even before the onset of symptoms.

Can I take my family member out of the facility?

If a resident is taken out of the facility, the possibility of introducing a new virus into the outbreak unit is also possible, which could extend the outbreak further.

Why can't children come to visit during an outbreak?

It is recommended that children 12 years old and under do not visit because they—like many of the residents—are at a higher risk of becoming ill.

Can I bring in food or drinks from outside?

It is recommended that you do not bring outside food or drinks into the outbreak unit of a long-term care facility during a gastrointestinal outbreak. Food or drinks brought in from outside the facility could potentially:

- cause food-borne illnesses,

- confuse signs and symptoms being monitored, and
- lengthen the outbreak.

What additional measures are put into place to control outbreaks?

- Residents experiencing illness are isolated to their rooms.
- Meal tray service is provided for ill residents in their room.
- All ill residents and staff dedicated to helping them are asked to stay within the outbreak unit (e.g., a dedicated area within the facility).
- Education is provided to staff, residents, and family members (e.g., hand hygiene and use of PPE).
- Communal activity restrictions may exist in the outbreak unit as per below.
- COVID-19 outbreaks:
 - ▶ Unless paused, group activities and communal dining may continue with outbreak unit residents separated from unexposed residents and units.
- Acute respiratory infection (ARI) outbreaks:
 - ▶ Unless paused, communal dining is permitted.
 - ▶ Group activities may be rescheduled.

- Enteric outbreaks:
 - ▶ Unless paused, communal dining is permitted for non-ill residents.
 - ▶ Visits by outside groups, such as entertainers and volunteer organizations are not permitted.
 - ▶ Group activities are cancelled.
 - ▶ On-site programs such as physiotherapy and foot care are conducted for residents in their rooms, if possible.
- Reschedule communal meetings on the affected unit/floor. Other meetings or activities, however, may proceed in non-affected areas if kept away from affected areas.
- Discontinue group outings from the affected unit/floor.
- Housekeeping staff increase cleaning and disinfecting of frequently touched surfaces (e.g., handrails and light switches).
- During an outbreak, the Outbreak Management Team—which includes the administrator, department managers, a charge nurse, and an infection control specialist—meet daily to review the outbreak status. In addition, a representative of Public Health Sudbury & Districts is consulted daily and recommends measures to bring the outbreak under control.

Who can I call for more information?

For more information about controlling outbreaks in long-term care and retirement homes, talk to a health care provider in the facility, or call Public Health Sudbury & Districts at 705.522.9200, ext. 464 for enteric outbreak and ext. 718 for respiratory outbreak.



***Thank you
for helping us
protect
your family.***