

Guidance on outbreaks of influenza in care homes



Do 2 or more residents or staff have the following symptoms?

Fever of 37.8 °C or above

OR

Sudden decline in physical or mental ability

PLUS

New onset or acute worsening of one or more of these symptoms:

- cough (with or without sputum)
- sneezing
- runny nose or congestion
- hoarseness
- sore throat
- shortness of breath
- wheezing
- chest pain

If you notice **2 or more** residents or staff with these symptoms occurring within **2 DAYS (48 HOURS)**, in the same area of the care home **and their GP(s) confirm the illness may be influenza**

You might have an outbreak
Contact the health protection unit immediately

and take the infection control measures listed below.

What the Health Protection Unit will do:

- Work with care home staff and GPs to identify the cause of the outbreak.
- Work with infection prevention and control nurses to advise on infection control measures.
- Work with GPs to provide treatment and prevention.

INFECTION PREVENTION AND CONTROL MEASURES

All residents and staff should be offered seasonal flu vaccination each year

Hand hygiene and protective clothing

- Ensure that **liquid soap and disposable paper towels** are available at all sinks.
- **Wash hands** thoroughly using liquid soap and water **before and after** any contact with residents.
- Provide **70% alcohol hand rub** for visitor use and supplementary use by staff.
- Staff should wear single-use **plastic aprons and gloves** as appropriate when dealing with affected residents. The HPU will advise on the use of surgical masks. Dispose of all these as infectious waste.

Cleaning and waste disposal

- Provide **tissues** and no-touch bins for used tissue disposal in public areas.
- Provide tissues and covered sputum pots for affected residents. Dispose of these as infectious waste.
- **Wash** residents' clothes, linen and soft furnishings on a regular basis, and keep all rooms clean.
- **Clean surfaces** of lockers, tables & chairs, televisions and floors etc frequently. Always clean hoists, lifting aids, baths and showers thoroughly between patients.

Reducing exposure

- **Close the home** (and any day care facility) to new admissions if the HPU confirms an outbreak.
- Residents should **not transfer** to other homes or attend external activities.
- Residents should only attend out-patient or investigation appointments where these are clinically urgent.
- Care for residents with symptoms in **single rooms** until fully recovered **and for at least 5 days** after the symptoms started.
- Affected residents should **remain in their rooms** as far as possible. Discourage residents with symptoms from using common areas.
- Staff should work in **separate teams**: one team caring for affected residents and the other caring for unaffected residents.
- Agency and temporary staff in contact with residents with symptoms should **not work elsewhere** (e.g. in a local acute care hospital) until the outbreak is declared over (i.e. **7 days after the onset of the last case**).
- Staff and visitors with symptoms should be excluded from the home until fully recovered **and for at least 5 days** after the onset of symptoms.
- The elderly, very young and pregnant women, who are at **greater risk** from the complications of flu, should be discouraged from visiting during an outbreak.
- Inform visiting health professionals of the outbreak and **rearrange non-urgent visits** to the home.
- Inform the hospital in advance if a resident requires admission to hospital during the outbreak.

