



Public Health
England

Protecting and improving the nation's health

Winter-readiness information for London care homes

About Public Health England

Public Health England exists to protect and improve the nation's health and wellbeing, and reduce health inequalities. We do this through world-leading science, knowledge and intelligence, advocacy, partnerships and the delivery of specialist public health services. We are an executive agency of the Department of Health and Social Care, and a distinct delivery organisation with operational autonomy. We provide government, local government, the NHS, Parliament, industry and the public with evidence-based professional, scientific and delivery expertise and support.

Public Health England

Wellington House

133-155 Waterloo Road

London SE1 8UG

Tel: 020 7654 8000

www.gov.uk/phe

Twitter: [@PHE_uk](https://twitter.com/PHE_uk)

Facebook: www.facebook.com/PublicHealthEngland

Prepared by: Samantha Perkins and Karen Hawker (on behalf of the London Health Protection Teams' influenza and care homes leads).

For queries relating to this document, please contact: sam.perkins@phe.gov.uk



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Introduction

As winter approaches, it is important that care home managers are reminded and updated on important health considerations for their residents.

Care home residents and staff in long-stay residential care homes are particularly susceptible to infections which increase over the winter months, such as seasonal influenza (flu) and stomach infections (such as norovirus). These are very infectious and cause outbreaks in residential settings due to the close contact between residents and staff. Transmission can sometimes be facilitated by inadequate infection control practices by carers.

Elderly people or those with chronic illnesses are also at risk of developing complications from certain vaccine-preventable diseases such as pneumococcal, flu and shingles infections. It is important that they are immunised to prevent such complications or reduce the likelihood of outbreaks in a care home.

This briefing provides:

1. Key messages for care home managers on winter preparedness.
2. Two checklists on flu and norovirus readiness and when and how to report outbreaks.
3. Leaflets and further information on flu, norovirus and shingles.

Key messages for care home managers on winter preparedness

1. Be prepared ✓

- Ensure your residents and staff are immunised against flu and have a stockpile of personal protective equipment (PPE) (see checklist on page 6).
- Ensure your residents over the age of 65 are immunised against pneumococcal infection.
- Ensure your residents who turn 70 or 78 years of age on or after 1 April 2018 are immunised against shingles. Please note that the shingles vaccine is available throughout the year. The vaccine is also available for those previously eligible but who missed immunisation. For example, anyone in their 70s who was born after 1 September 1942 and has not yet had the vaccine plus anyone aged 79 years who has missed out on the vaccine. Further information on shingles can be found on the [NHS choices website](#).

2. Recognise outbreaks ✓

3. Report outbreaks to your local health protection team seven days a week ✓

- North West London - 020 3326 1658
- North East and North Central London - 020 3837 7084
- South London - 0344 326 2052

Use the following weblink to find details of your local health protection team:

www.gov.uk/health-protection-team

London care home planning checklist for seasonal influenza (flu)

| Date completed | Completed by | |
|--|--------------|----------|
| Actions to prepare for cases of seasonal flu | ✓ | X |
| Flu vaccination | | |
| 1. Do you have any residents aged over 65? | | |
| 2. Do you have any residents in a clinical risk group (including those with diabetes, chronic respiratory, cardiac, kidney or neurological disease)? | | |
| 3. If yes to the above, ensure that the care home GP has administered the seasonal flu vaccine to residents in both categories in the autumn before any outbreaks of flu. | | |
| 4. Ensure that all staff involved in patient care (including all women at any stage of pregnancy) have received their seasonal flu vaccine in the autumn before any outbreaks of flu. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff can obtain the flu vaccine either from their GP or through arrangements made by their employer for occupational health • Further information is in the Flu vaccination leaflet "Who should have it and why" | | |
| Respiratory hygiene & infection control precautions | | |
| 5. Ensure infection control policies are up to date, read and followed by all staff. Further information on the prevention and control of infection in care homes is also available at this Department of Health link | | |
| 6. Reinforce education of staff about hand and respiratory hygiene. Use this link for respiratory and hand hygiene posters e.g. Catch it, Bin it, Kill it | | |
| 7. Ensure that liquid soap and disposable paper towels are available, and/or alcohol-based hand rub, in every room and communal areas, and stock levels are adequately maintained | | |
| 8. Ensure that Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is readily available i.e. disposable gloves, aprons, surgical masks. | | |
| 9. Ensure linen management systems are in place as well as clinical waste disposal systems including foot operated bins. | | |
| 10. Ensure appropriate isolation of residents/staff with symptoms for a minimum of 5 days after the onset of symptoms or until fully recovered. Single cases should be isolated in their bedroom or, if there are two or more cases, consider cohorting them in a separate floor or wing of the home. | | |
| 11. If possible and safe to do so, use alcohol gel in places where hand washing facilities are not available (e.g. entrances/exits, residents' lounge, dining room), and maintain supplies in view of increased use. | | |
| 12. Maintain adequate levels of cleaning materials in anticipation of increased cleaning (e.g. disposable cloths, detergent) | | |
| 13. Transfer of residents to hospital or other institutions should be avoided unless clinically necessary/medical emergency and advised by the GP. | | |
| 14. If a resident is transferred back to the care home from a hospital/institution with an influenza outbreak, inform the local health protection team. | | |
| Reporting to the local health protection team | | |
| 15. Early recognition of an influenza/respiratory illness outbreak amongst staff and/or residents is vital (i.e. two or more cases linked by time and place). | | |
| 16. Outbreaks of influenza/respiratory illness should be reported promptly to the local health protection team. | | |
| 17. Maintain high standards of record keeping in the event of an outbreak of acute respiratory illness to help investigate the outbreak (i.e. list of staff and resident cases incl. dates of birth, GP details, symptoms, date of onset of symptoms of the first case, total number of residents in the care home, location of cases and the flu vaccination status of cases) | | |
| 18. The health protection team will undertake a risk assessment and provide further advice (e.g. nose/throat swabs required and advice on those requiring antiviral treatment). | | |

London care home planning checklist for norovirus season

| Date completed | Completed by | |
|--|--------------|---|
| Actions to prepare for norovirus (winter vomiting bug) season | ✓ | X |
| Infection control precautions | | |
| Ensure infection control policies are up to date, read and followed by all staff | | |
| Conduct a hand hygiene audit. Educate staff on the importance of hand hygiene and the appropriate technique, especially during outbreaks. | | |
| Ensure that liquid soap and disposable paper hand towels are available in all toilets and communal bathrooms, including individuals' room/en-suite. | | |
| Ensure that Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is available and kept outside affected residents' rooms – i.e. disposable gloves, aprons. | | |
| Ensure linen management systems are in place as well as clinical waste disposal systems including foot operated bins. | | |
| Reporting to the local health protection team | | |
| Early recognition of a diarrhoea and/or vomiting (D&V) outbreak amongst staff and/or residents in care homes is vital (i.e. two or more cases linked by time and place). | | |
| Outbreaks of D&V should be reported promptly to the local health protection team for a full risk assessment and further guidance (even if care home already aware of local diarrhoea and vomiting outbreak management guidelines). | | |
| Diarrhoea and/or vomiting outbreak control measures | | |
| Immediate control measures to be put into place when an outbreak of D&V is recognised are: Isolation of residents/affected staff until clear of symptoms for 48 hours Consider cohorting of affected residents/staff on a separate floor or wing of the home Enhanced cleaning of the environment with a hypochlorite solution. Effective hand washing with liquid soap and water (do NOT use alcohol-based hand rub as this has limited effectiveness against diarrhoeal diseases). | | |
| Brief all staff on infection prevention and control measures during the outbreak e.g. during handover sessions throughout the day. | | |
| Care home manager should organise stool sample collection of residents as requested by either the home GP or the health protection team. | | |
| Maintain high standards of record keeping to investigate the outbreak and help identify the source of the infection by completing a log sheet (i.e. list of staff and resident cases incl. dates of birth, GP details, symptoms and frequency, date of onset of symptoms of the first case, location of cases) | | |
| Remove all alcohol gel in use in the event of a D&V outbreak, as this has limited effectiveness against diarrhoeal diseases). | | |
| Admissions/discharges should be suspended until the home has had no new cases for 72 hours and outbreak is over. | | |
| Ensure residents are clinically assessed by their GP and rehydrated adequately. | | |
| Transfer of residents to hospital or other institutions should be avoided unless in a medical emergency. If a transfer is necessary, inform the ambulance provider AND the receiving hospital/institution of the outbreak. This should be done before arrival if possible. | | |
| Restrict visiting as much as possible and any visitors including health professionals should be advised of the outbreak and the need for thorough hand washing, using soap and water where feasible. Take advice from the HPT on excluding peripatetic staff such as occupational therapists and physiotherapists during an outbreak. | | |
| Refer to the norovirus poster online for further information which can be displayed for staff and visitors in the care home. | | |

Resources

General infection control resource

Helping to prevent infection: a quick guide for managers and staff in care homes

<https://www.nice.org.uk/Media/Default/About/NICE-Communities/Social-care/quick-guides/Infection%20prevention.pdf>

Flu

Checklist

See checklist on page 6 for actions to prepare for seasonal influenza.

Leaflet - Flu vaccination: who should have it this winter and why

www.gov.uk/government/publications/flu-vaccination-who-should-have-it-this-winter-and-why

Leaflet - Flu leaflet for people with learning disability

An easy to read leaflet providing information on influenza (flu) and vaccination.

www.gov.uk/government/publications/flu-leaflet-for-people-with-learning-disability

NHS Flu Fighters Campaign has a section for residential care:

<http://www.nhsemployers.org/campaigns/flu-fighter/flu-fighter-residential-care>

Guidance on outbreaks of influenza in care homes poster:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-outbreaks-of-influenza-in-care-homes-poster>

Further information and leaflets on flu can be found at:

www.gov.uk/government/collections/annual-flu-programme

Norovirus

Checklist

See checklist on page 7 for actions to prepare for the winter vomiting bug (norovirus) and what to do in an outbreak.

Poster

Further information is available in this norovirus poster and can be displayed for staff and visitors in the care home

www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/322947/Stop_norovirus_spreading_this_winter_leaflet.pdf

Shingles

Leaflets

These leaflets describe shingles and the benefits of vaccination for adults. The shingles vaccine is available throughout the year.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/697573/Shingles_leaflet.pdf

Further information on shingles can be found on the [NHS choices website](#).