

Norovirus Outbreak Action Plan

- 1 The most common cause of gastrointestinal infection in care homes is Norovirus (also known as winter vomiting bug). Norovirus is transmitted from person-to-person via airborne particles or the faecal-oral route and contaminated environment or equipment. Cases of diarrhoea and vomiting are regarded as infectious until 48 hours after symptoms stop.
- 2 The definition of a potential Norovirus outbreak is 'two or more separate episodes of diarrhoea and/or vomiting that are not explained by another diagnosis or process (such as known colitis, enteral feeding, laxative use, etc.) among two or more residents or staff members associated with the care home'.
- 3 If two or more residents or staff members display symptoms over a short period of time, notify the Public Health Agency Duty Room (028 9055 2994) and the Regulation Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA). If the care home is a Trust facility, the Trust Infection Control Team must be informed.
- 4 Individual GPs of affected residents should be informed and should be asked to review residents as required, depending on clinical condition/medical status.
- 5 Residents with symptoms of diarrhoea and/or vomiting should be nursed in their own rooms. If there is shared accommodation within the care facility, potential options to group residents (known as cohorting) may be explored with the Duty Room, Public Health Agency or with the Trust Infection Control Team if the care home is a Trust facility.
- 6 Movement of residents should be avoided while the outbreak is on-going, unless this is medically required. If a resident is transferring to another service or to hospital, the receiving unit/service must be informed of the outbreak in advance, even if the resident is symptom free. The ambulance and/or transfer service must also be advised in advance, so that they can take the necessary precautions.
- 7 Hand washing is the single most important measure in preventing further spread of infection.
- 8 All staff and visitors should be regularly reminded to wash their hands with Virusan handwash before entering and leaving the facility, and before entering and leaving each resident's room.
- 9 Residents should wash their hands after using the toilet, before eating and at any other opportunity as required.
- 10 Carers should wear gloves and disposable plastic aprons to toilet or clean residents who have soiled themselves. When disposing of bodily waste, or when handling soiled bed linen and clothes, wash hands with Virusan handwash after removing gloves with liquid soap and water, dry hands thoroughly with disposable hand towels.
- 11 Movement of staff between floors and wings in the care facility should be restricted. Staff should be advised not to work in other care homes or other healthcare settings while the outbreak is on-going.
- 12 If staff members become symptomatic, they must be sent off duty and specimens should be obtained. Staff must not return to work until they have been without symptoms for 48 hours.
- 13 Stool and/or vomit samples should be obtained from symptomatic residents and staff. These should be sent for laboratory testing to help establish the cause of the outbreak or incident.
- 14 Symptomatic residents must have separate toilet facilities (i.e. toilet or dedicated commode) which have easy access to hand washing facilities.
- 15 Stop all bowel medicines (i.e. laxatives and anti-diarrhoeal drugs), unless instructed NOT to do so by GP.

Note: a 48 hour exclusion period for staff is advised in current clinical guidance, however a 72 hour exclusion period should be considered for staff who handle food in the care home.

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- 16** Dispose of excreta into the toilet or bedpan washer; process commode pots in a bedpan washer. Where this facility is not available, care must be taken when cleaning commode pots. Complete this process in a designated area with a deep sink using Virusolve+ diluted at 5% and hot water.
- 17** Clean and dry commode chairs after use. The seat, back, arms and frame should be cleaned. Particular attention should be given to cleaning the underside of the commode frame and arms. Virusolve+ diluted at 5% should be used.
- 18** Linen which has been contaminated with faeces or vomitus should be placed in a water-soluble bag and transported to the laundry (without delay). Do not manually sluice or hand-wash linen. Programme the washing machine to the pre-wash/sluice cycle – follow this with a hot wash.
- 19** Deal with spillages of body fluids immediately. Meticulous environmental cleaning is essential, particularly in toilet and bathroom areas and in other areas which are shared. Use Virusolve+ diluted at 5%. This will not only kill Norovirus bacteria within five minutes of contact, but residual action will continue to work for up to 7 days helping to contain the infection.
- 20** Use Virusolve+ diluted at 5% to regularly clean (at least 3 times per day) 'touch' points such as toilet flush, door handles, grab-rails, taps and light-switches. Clean carpets and soft furnishings with hot water.
- 21** Serve hot cooked food during outbreaks. Remove exposed food from communal areas, e.g. fruit in bowls.
- 22** Admissions and transfers of new residents* to the home should be stopped until 48 hours after the last symptoms among residents.
*Note: a new resident is a new admission who has not previously been resident in your care home.
- 23** If an existing resident** is discharged from acute services (i.e. transferred back from hospital care), they can be received into their own single room in the home after it has been terminally cleaned (if required). Residents received from acute services should be nursed in isolation in their own room until 48 hours after the last symptoms among residents in the facility (i.e. when the outbreak is concluded).
**Note: an existing resident is someone who is usually resident in your care home and who has been transferred to another service (e.g. acute hospital services) for a period of care.
- 24** Arrangements should be agreed (including additional staff as required) to complete a deep-clean of the home once outbreak has been declared over. This declaration is confirmed by the home owner/manager to the Duty Room, Public Health Agency.

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