

Outbreak Management:

A guide for residents, families and visitors



A long-term care facility is a high-risk area for the transmission of illnesses. As a family member or friend visiting our facility, we ask that you review this information to help reduce the risk of transmission and understand what happens during an outbreak.



What is an outbreak?

According to the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care, an outbreak is the occurrence of more cases of disease than normally expected within a specific place or group of people over a period of time.

There are two main types of outbreaks:

- respiratory
- gastrointestinal/enteric

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
- if the entire facility is affected.

According to Ontario regulations under the Health Protection and Promotion Act, outbreaks must be reported to the Medical Officer of Health.

Before you visit

To obtain outbreak information, we recommend you call the facility prior to your visit.

During your visit

- Look for signage identifying any outbreak. Signs will be posted throughout the facility in the following locations:
 - front entrance
 - inside the elevators
 - on the door of any affected unit(s)
- Check your loved one's door. Precaution signage will be posted if your loved one is affected by an outbreak.
- Speak to a nurse before visiting your family any time you see outbreak signage in the facility or on your loved one's door to receive more information.



Can family members visit a facility during an outbreak?

Typically, yes. Our goal is to educate families and allow them to continue to visit loved ones during an outbreak. Visitors are asked to follow Infection Prevention and Control (IPAC) Best Practices. Please speak to the charge nurse about IPAC Best Practice.



Important:

Get your flu shot annually to protect yourself and your loved ones.

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

- Do not visit if you are ill or have any of the following symptoms:
 - runny nose
 - nasal congestion
 - cough
 - sneezing
 - fever
 - body aches
 - chills
 - diarrhea
 - vomiting
- Be sure to sanitize your hands when entering and exiting the facility. Hand hygiene is the best way to prevent the transmission of infection.
- Upon entering the long-term care facility, speak with the nurse before visiting with your family member.
- If a resident is ill, you may be requested to wear personal protective equipment (PPE) prior to entering a resident's room, e.g., mask with facial shield, gown and gloves.

- We ask that you limit any visits with residents in an outbreak unit to their room.
- Before leaving a resident's room:
 - remove any PPE
 - discard the used PPE in the garbage provided inside the room
 - properly sanitize your hands
- Please do not escort a resident out of an outbreak unit.



How long does a respiratory outbreak last?

- A respiratory outbreak can last for eight days or more based on:
 - the type of infectious agent causing the outbreak; and
 - compliance with control measures.
- The eight-day outbreak duration is based on a three-day incubation period and five-day period of communicability (e.g., when the illness is contagious).
- The facility remains on outbreak status until eight days after the last ill resident starts showing symptoms.
- For each additional resident that becomes ill, the outbreak is extended another eight days before the outbreak status is lifted.
- During respiratory outbreaks, ill residents are isolated in their rooms for five days or until they are symptom-free—whichever comes first.
- The Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU) is consulted 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 infectious agent causing the infection; and
 - compliance with control measures.
- Residents are isolated for 48 hours after their last symptom resolves.
- The SMDHU is consulted to officially declare the “outbreak over”.





Why do residents have to stay in the unit and why is the unit closed?

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

Can I take my family member out of the facility?

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**.

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 of age and under do not visit because they—like many of the residents—are at a higher risk of acquiring illness.

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.



Additional measures 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).
- Life Enrichment programs are modified in the outbreak unit:
 - Large group activities are cancelled; and
 - One-on-one activities are made available to the residents to assist in minimizing the effects of isolation.
- Non-urgent appointments are rescheduled. If an appointment is critical, the resident will attend.
- Housekeeping staff increase cleaning of frequently touched surfaces (e.g., hand rails 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 the SMDHU is consulted routinely throughout the outbreak and as needed. This SMDHU representative recommends measures to bring the outbreak under control.



*Thank you for helping us
protect your family.*

If you have questions,
please call the Communicable Disease Program at the
Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit
705-721-7520 or 1-877-721-7520 x8809
or visit www.smdhu.org