



Public Sector Residential Aged Care Bulletin

This bulletin provides information on current and important issues for Public Sector Residential Aged Care sector. Previous editions are available at: www.health.vic.gov.au/agedcare/publications/newsletters/index.htm

Managing outbreaks of infectious diseases

*Don't wait for an outbreak to occur in your residential aged care service
for you to work out your strategy!*

Effective risk management is critical to ensuring service quality in residential aged care facilities. Having a contingency plan in place will position you well in the event that an outbreak occurs in your service.

Due to general ageing processes, level of frailty and communal living environments, residents of aged care facilities are particularly prone to the spread of certain infectious diseases and infestations. Identifying and mitigating the risks associated with caring for elderly frail residents is fundamental to effective management.

Management starts with the identification of those diseases/illnesses and infestations that can occur in residential aged care facilities. As a starting point, consideration could be given to planning for managing an outbreak of gastroenteritis, influenza, head lice or scabies. An outbreak of any of these could occur in your service at any time possibly causing widespread illness and discomfort amongst residents and staff. In addition, it is highly likely that an outbreak of any significance would impact on your normal business operations.

Planning is essential to establish contingency arrangements and address gaps in preparedness, so that you can be in the best possible position to manage an outbreak, should it occur. It is important to include in your planning consideration the expected accountabilities and responsibilities of management and staff. Equally important is for such plans and associated information to be reviewed and updated regularly and also known by all staff.

Where at all possible it is sensible to embed processes and practices for preventing and managing potential outbreaks into your everyday operational and organisational systems.

*Effective hand washing, by all
residents, staff and visitors,
is the single most
important measure
for preventing & controlling
the spread of infection.*

You could consider the following questions to assist with your planning:

Occurrence of an outbreak

- If an outbreak or infestation occurred in your service tomorrow do you know where to access expertise if required?
- Are there arrangements in place to effectively coordinate the activities of visiting general practitioners or other health care professionals treating/managing residents during an outbreak?
- What processes are used to restrict visitor access during an outbreak?
- What processes are in place for consistency of staffing personnel during the period of an outbreak?
- What records are required to be kept about people affected and their reported symptoms during an outbreak?
- How well are you prepared if outbreak management protocols needed to be exercised after-hours, weekends or on public holidays?

Policy and procedures

- ❑ What information is included in your infection control policies and procedures about the prevention and management of infectious disease outbreaks?
- ❑ What infectious diseases are to be reported to public health or other authorities?
- ❑ Do position descriptions include the requirement to adhere to organisational infection control standards and requirements?
- ❑ Are immunisation and vaccination records maintained for residents and staff?
- ❑ What vaccinations and treatments are available to staff, volunteers and residents and how is uptake of these promoted and encouraged?
- ❑ What infection control resources and expertise are available to your residential aged care service?
- ❑ Are quality assurance activities routinely undertaken for the monitoring and surveillance of infection control practices and symptoms of infectious disease or infestation?

Communication

- ❑ What communication protocols are in place to provide timely and accurate reporting about outbreak notification and its management to staff, residents and their representatives, friends and relevant stakeholders (relevant stakeholders should include the Department of Health and Ageing and public health authorities where indicated)?
- ❑ What information is provided to residents and their representatives about the risks and management of infectious disease and infestation at pre-entry stage; and at point of admission to the aged care facility, and on an ongoing basis?
- ❑ Would you consider including information about infection control management and infectious disease and infestation risk in your resident information package?

Staff training

- ❑ How are all key staff made aware of the regulatory and reporting requirements for infectious disease?
- ❑ Are staff and volunteers informed of the risks of infectious diseases and infestation, their accountabilities and responsibilities in relation to the prevention and management of an outbreak in the aged care environment during orientation and on an ongoing basis?
- ❑ How do you know that staff are familiar with standard precautions and the work practices that are required, as well as the specific circumstances where additional precautions are needed?
- ❑ What infection control training is required for staff and volunteers, and how does this occur?
- ❑ Are competencies in this area considered as part of the routine review processes?
- ❑ How do you ensure arrangements with agency and contracted personnel incorporate your organisational infection control procedure?

Reporting Requirements

If you become aware of two or more cases of diarrhoea and/or vomiting in either residents or staff, or clusters of other infectious diseases we recommend that you undertake the following:

- ❑ Immediately notify the Department of Human Services, Public Health, on 1300 651 160.
- ❑ In cases of gastroenteritis also notify your local Council Health Department.
- ❑ For urgent after hours notifications please ring the Department of Human Services after hours service on 1300 790 733.

General enquiries

- ❑ General enquiries can be made to the Department of Human Services, Public Health, on 1300 651 160.

Serious concerns

- ❑ If you have concerns about the impact of an outbreak on residents and informing the broader community you should contact the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing on 1800 550 552.

Food, supplies and equipment

- ❑ How are the food safety and cleaning standards for buildings, fixtures, resident equipment and the general environment monitored in your service?
- ❑ How do you ensure that equipment such as washing machines, dryers, dishwashers, pan flushers and other thermal equipment is fit for purpose, tested and calibrated routinely?
- ❑ How do you ensure that personal protection equipment (PPE) such as disposable gloves, masks and gowns is available in sufficient quantities?
- ❑ If you needed additional PPE in the event of a widespread outbreak can your normal supply arrangements be adjusted appropriately with 'just in time' supply or do you need to carry contingency supplies?
- ❑ Would your normal clinical waste disposal arrangements suffice in the event of an outbreak or do you need to plan for additional requirements?
- ❑ Would your existing linen supply be sufficient in the event of an outbreak and would you need

contingency arrangements in place in the event of an outbreak?

- ❑ Have you considered inclusions in existing supply contracts for additional service provision in the event of an outbreak?
- ❑ Would you have suitable access to services and supplies if required after-hours and on weekends?

The questions above are a starting point for considering your planning and are not exhaustive of everything you would need to consider in order to prevent and manage a potential outbreak in your aged care service. However, if an outbreak does occur, consideration of the above questions would position you favourably to manage some of the issues that could arise.

Leadership is critical

The importance of the leadership role during a wide spread outbreak of an infectious disease or infestation should not be underestimated. To manage a widespread outbreak effectively, it is important to ensure that the situation is led through the establishment of clear objectives and reporting and accountability protocols, combined with the effective co-ordination of required activities. Having a nominated key contact for the communication of clear and accurate information with all internal and external stakeholders is of prime importance, and media liaison and management may need to be considered. In short, if an outbreak of significant scale does occur in your service, it is useful to view it as an extraordinary operating situation that may call for extraordinary measures.

Notwithstanding the amount of planning, preparation and management that may have occurred in relation to an outbreak, there are post outbreak measures that should be considered. These include the need to provide some form of debriefing mechanism for staff, residents and their families. This provides the opportunity to acknowledge and reward the effort and cooperation expended and any negative consequences that may have occurred in relation to an outbreak. This is a good time to evaluate and review your management, planning, policies and procedures again: what worked well and what could be improved in the event of a future outbreak?

Coming Events & Key Dates

Wednesday 21 & Thursday 22 November: Aged Care Quality Improvement seminar at the IBIS Hotel in Melbourne.

Friday 23 November: 14th Ministerial Rural and Regional Health Forum, which has an aged care focus.

Friday 30 November: Advanced Care Planning Forum
<http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/ahs/continuingcare/newslet.htm>

Further Information

Further information and guidelines include:

- ❑ Infectious Diseases Epidemiology & Surveillance website at www.health.vic.gov.au/ideas, which includes *The Blue Book – Guidelines for the control of infectious diseases*
- ❑ Links to relevant information for the public at www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au
- ❑ *Infection control guidelines for the prevention of transmission of infectious diseases in the health care setting* at www.aodgp.gov.au/internet/wcms/publishing.nsf/content/icg-guidelines-index.htm

Aged Care Funding Instrument (ACFI) update

The Commonwealth's new ACFI will come into operation from March 2008. A national program of training for managers has commenced in September 2007. Training sessions are available throughout the State and distance education is available for remote services.

The two day management training focuses on the significant administrative changes and eBusiness issues brought about by the ACFI. This training is expected to be essential to the effective implementation of the ACFI. All services are expected to be represented by at least one manager. Additional places are available for purchase (\$240 per place, subject to availability).

Detailed information on ACFI can now be found at the Department of Health & Ageing's website at the following address:

<http://www.healthconnect.gov.au/internet/wcms/publishing.nsf/content/ageing-acfi-training.htm>

The **Future Directions** section of the webpage includes advice that the Department of Health & Ageing also intends to explore the possibilities of Aged Care Assessment Teams performing Aged Care Funding Instrument (ACFI) assessments and the possibility of introducing additional components into the ACFI for use in community care assessments.

The Department of Human Services Aged Care Branch will continue to provide information and support to public sector residential aged care services to assist the transition to the ACFI. We welcome feedback on implementation issues and associated risks.

Contributions

We are keen to hear your feedback on this bulletin and to publish your stories and contributions in future editions.

These can be sent to:
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