



UK Health
Security
Agency

UKHSA care home infection readiness pack

Information for care homes in South East England

Winter 2026/27

Contents

Contents	2
Introduction	3
Key messages for care home managers	3
How to contact us	3
Be prepared	4
What to do if a staff member is unwell	4
What to do if a resident is unwell	5
How to use and report the Combo Rapid LFD results	6
How to take the test:	6
Understanding the results:	7
Reporting the results:	7
Preparation checklists	9
FAQ on UKHSA Combo Rapid LFDs	12
FAQ on Report an outbreak	13
About UKHSA	14
Further resources	15
Cold weather	15
COVID-19	15
Flu	15
Norovirus	15
Pneumococcal disease	15
RSV (respiratory syncytial virus)	16
Shingles	16
Visiting guidance	16

Introduction

This pack provides information for care homes on preparing for the winter season and using the UKHSA Combo Rapid LFD tests, to try and help avoid cases and manage outbreaks of infectious disease.

Care home residents and staff are susceptible to infections which increase over the winter months, such as respiratory and stomach infections. These are very infectious and can cause outbreaks due to close contact in residential settings.

Good infection control practices can help reduce the risk of outbreaks occurring.

This briefing provides:

- When to report to your local health protection team if residents are unwell (i.e. you think you have an outbreak)
- When and how to use UKHSA Combo Rapid LFDs
- When and how to contact UKHSA online using the Report An Outbreak tool
- What to do if a staff member is unwell
- Preparation checklists to help prevent and prepare for respiratory and norovirus infections

Key messages for care home managers

How to contact us

For a respiratory outbreak, please inform UKHSA SE online (no need to call) at:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/report-an-outbreak-of-acute-respiratory-infection-in-an-adult-social-care-setting>

For all other outbreaks and enquiries, our contact details are:

- a. Telephone (Mon-Fri 9am-5pm): 0344 225 3861
- b. Email (Mon-Fri 9am-5pm): SE.AcuteResponse@ukhsa.gov.uk
- c. Out-of-hours telephone (Mon-Fri 5pm-9am, Saturday and Sunday, and Bank Holidays): 0344 225 3861

Be prepared

- Have a stockpile of personal protective equipment (PPE).
- Keep a supply of NHS COVID-19 LFD tests for residents eligible for COVID-19 treatment.
- Know where your UKHSA Combo Rapid LFD tests are.
- Ensure all residents and staff are immunised against flu.
- Ensure all care home residents are offered COVID-19 vaccination.
- Ensure all adults living in a care home for older adults are eligible and anyone 75 years and older are offered RSV vaccine.
- Ensure your residents age of 65 and over are immunised against pneumococcal infection.
- Ensure adults turning 65, those aged 70-79 and those 18 and over with a severely weakened immune system are offered the shingles vaccine.
- Ensure you have reviewed your infection control policy, and staff are aware of the procedures.

Links for further information on vaccinations can be found in this document.

Please use the winter preparedness checklists **as early as possible** and consider how to best prepare and prevent infections this winter.

What to do if a staff member is unwell

Staff who have symptoms of **respiratory infection** and who have a **high temperature** or **do not feel well enough** to go to work are advised to stay away from work and try to avoid contact with other people.

They should not use the combo Rapid LFD

Return: They should not return to work until they no longer have a high temperature (if they had one) or until they no longer feel unwell

Any member of staff who has **diarrhoea and/or vomiting** should be **sent home immediately**.

Return: They should not return to the care home until **48 hours after** normal bowel habits have returned and any vomiting has stopped.

What to do if a resident is unwell

General concerns

If you are concerned about the health of a resident, then remember to contact their **GP or appropriate healthcare provider** for management.

COVID-19

If the resident is eligible for COVID-19 treatment and has symptoms then test use an NHS COVID LFD. If positive, then inform their GP or appropriate healthcare provider immediately. There is no need to contact UKHSA for single cases of COVID in care homes.

Respiratory outbreak

If **two or more residents have deteriorated and/or are unwell with respiratory symptoms** then use the Combo rapid LFDs.

Inform UKHSA of the outbreak (and any LFD results), by completing the Report an outbreak tool online; <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/report-an-outbreak-of-acute-respiratory-infection-in-an-adult-social-care-setting>.

Diarrhoea & vomiting outbreak

If **two or more people, (residents and/or staff) have diarrhoea or vomiting** within 48 hours, then call UKHSA on 0344 225 3861.

How to use and report the Combo Rapid LFD results

How to take the test:

Use the LFDs on at least two and up to five symptomatic residents

- Step 1 Inside, you'll find a swab (like a soft cotton bud), a small tube with liquid, and a test strip that looks like a mini plastic stick. Take the swab out - don't touch the soft tip.
- Step 2 Gently put the soft tip just inside one nostril (a couple of centimetres). Turn it around 5 times in that nostril. Do the same in the other nostril.
- Step 3 Put the swab into the little tube with the liquid. Swirl it around for about 10 seconds to mix it well.
- Step 4 Take the swab out and throw it away.
- Step 5 Put 3 drops of the liquid from the tube onto each of the small circles on the test strip.
- Step 6 Wait for 10 minutes. Lines will appear on the test strip.



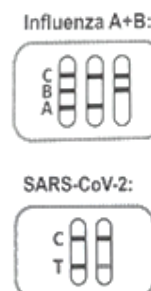
Understanding the results:

1. The test is valid only if there is a line next to **C** (control)

2. If you see a line next to **A** or **B** this means **flu positive**.

3. A line next to **T** means **COVID-19 positive**. Seek clinical advice if treatment might be needed.

4. A line next to **A** or **B**, and **T**, means **Flu + COVID-19 positive**.



Reporting the results:

From **7th September 2026**, care homes should **not call** the SE HPT. Instead, report any outbreak of respiratory infection and all LFD test results (positive OR negative), online at:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/report-an-outbreak-of-acute-respiratory-infection-in-an-adult-social-care-setting>

If you cannot test residents, do not wait. Report as soon as possible.

You'll need to know the:

- setting postcode
- Care Quality Commission (CQC) location ID, if you are CQC registered
- total number of service users and staff in your setting
- number of service users and staff with symptoms
- dates when people's symptoms started
- test results for anyone tested for any ARI, for example COVID-19, flu or RSV
- number of service users and staff vaccinated for COVID-19 and flu
- number of service users vaccinated for RSV

You'll need to give your email address to access the service.

After completing the online form, some care homes may also be asked to call the UKHSA health protection team on **0344 225 3861**.

Reporting an outbreak online will also automatically send out replacement LFD kits, for eligible settings, without having to do anything else (these can take 1-2 weeks to arrive).

Preparation checklists

☒ Care Home Vaccination Checklist

Section	Checklist Item	Date Completed	Completed By
COVID-19: Vaccination & Testing	Ensure the care home GP (or alternative provider) offers COVID-19 vaccination to all eligible residents, available from 1 st October 2026: - Adults aged 75 and over - Residents in care homes for older adults - Individuals who are immunosuppressed (aged 6 months and over)		
	Note: Frontline health and social care workers (HSCWs) and care home staff will not routinely be eligible for COVID-19 vaccination under the autumn 2026 national programme.		
	Ensure a supply of NHS COVID-19 LFD test kits is available to test residents eligible for COVID-19 treatment, if they become unwell. Kits are available from participating pharmacies.		
Flu: Vaccination for Residents and Staff	Ensure the care home GP (or alternative provider) offers flu vaccination to all eligible residents and encourage frontline staff (including agency workers), available from 1 st October 2026: - People aged 65 and over - Adults aged 18–64 in clinical risk groups - Residents in long-stay care homes - Frontline workers in social care settings		
	Advise any pregnant staff that they are eligible for the seasonal flu vaccine (available from 1 st September 2026).		
RSV: Vaccination for Residents and Staff	Advise any staff who are 28 weeks pregnant or more that they are eligible for the RSV vaccine (arranged via their GP).		

Infection-readiness information for care homes in South East England 2026/27

	Ensure RSV vaccination is offered to all residents in a care home for older adults OR anyone aged 75 and over OR those aged 65 and over with a severely weakened immune system , who have not been previously vaccinated. (This is a one-time vaccine.)		
Pneumococcal: Vaccination for Residents and Staff	Ensure pneumococcal vaccination is offered to residents aged 65 and over who have not been previously vaccinated. This is usually a one-time vaccine although some people at higher risk may require extra doses.		
	Advise members of staff aged 65 and over or those at higher risk of getting seriously ill at any age that they are also eligible for this vaccine and should discuss with their healthcare provider. This is usually a one-time vaccine although some people at higher risk may require extra doses.		

☒ **Care Home Checklist: Planning for Norovirus (Winter Vomiting Bug)**

Section	Checklist Item	Date Completed	Completed By
Infection Control Precautions	Ensure infection control policies are up to date, read, and followed by all staff		
	Conduct a handwashing audit and educate staff on correct handwashing technique and importance		
	Ensure liquid soap and disposable paper towels are available in all toilets, communal bathrooms, and ensuite rooms		
	Ensure PPE is available – gloves, aprons, and masks		
	Check that linen management and clinical waste systems are in place, including foot-operated bins		
	Display the Norovirus poster (attached to pack)		
	Remind staff with symptoms to stay off work until 48 hours after symptoms have stopped		
Reporting to Health Protection Team (HPT)	Ensure you know how to recognise an outbreak (2 or more cases of diarrhoea and/or vomiting within 48 hours among staff and/or residents)		
	Know how to report suspected or confirmed outbreaks to your local HPT — even if local guidelines are already known		
	Be ready to maintain records during outbreaks: prepare a staff/resident list with name, DOB, and room number to track symptoms and onset dates during any outbreak		

FAQ on UKHSA Combo Rapid LFDs

How to reorder UKHSA Combo Rapid LFDs / report results of LFDs?

This will happen automatically when you use the report an outbreak tool, they will take a couple of weeks to arrive.

What should I do if the care home has not received the Combo Rapid LFDs?

If you cannot find Combo Rapid LFDs in your setting, then please email SE.AcuteResponse@ukhsa.gov.uk, to request your LFDs.

Please note that these tests are only available to care homes in the South East region. They are not available to other residential settings or in other regions (as yet).

What to do if UKHSA Combo Rapid LFD pack has expired?

These can be placed in general waste. There is no need to inform UKHSA.

If a resident has tested positive for COVID on the UKHSA Combo Rapid LFD, do they still need to be tested by an NHS COVID LFD?

If a resident has tested positive for COVID on an UKHSA Combo Rapid LFD and they are eligible for treatment, then this would usually be sufficient for NHS providers to start treatment.

In flu season, do we still need to test before starting flu antivirals?

If you have UKHSA LFDs that have not expired, then please use these before contacting UKHSA SE.

Can these tests be used on staff?

No. Do not use the Combo Rapid UKHSA LFDs for staff illness.

Do these LFD tests need to be verified with other tests?

These tests are very accurate and do not need to be checked with any other testing.

FAQ on Report an outbreak

What types of outbreaks should be reported?

Report:

- New outbreaks of respiratory infection
- COVID-19 outbreaks
- Influenza (flu) outbreaks
- RSV outbreaks
- Other respiratory virus outbreaks
- Unknown respiratory infection outbreaks
- Single confirmed cases of flu

Do not report updates to existing outbreaks through the online system.

Do I need to report a single case of COVID-19?

No. Single cases of COVID-19, RSV or other respiratory viruses do not need to be reported. Only single cases of flu should be reported.

What do I need to do if I have an outbreak?

If you have LFDs use the LFDs on the symptomatic residents. You'll need to know the:

- setting postcode
- Care Quality Commission (CQC) location ID, if you are CQC registered
- total number of service users and staff in your setting
- number of service users and staff with symptoms
- dates when people's symptoms started
- test results for anyone tested for any ARI, for example COVID-19, flu or RSV
- number of service users and staff vaccinated for COVID-19 and flu
- number of service users vaccinated for RSV

Go to the website: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/report-an-outbreak-of-acute-respiratory-infection-in-an-adult-social-care-setting>

You'll need to give your email address to access the service.

What happens after I submit a report?

The report is sent automatically to the Health Protection Team and, where applicable, Community Infection Prevention and Control teams. An acknowledgement email is sent to the provider, and advice is issued automatically.

Do I still need to follow outbreak control measures after reporting?

Yes. It is important to follow infection prevention and control measures when your care home has an outbreak. Providers should continue to follow national IPC guidance and respiratory outbreak management guidance. UKHSA will contact your care home if there is an outbreak of flu, as they may require urgent antiviral medications.

About UKHSA

As the nation's expert national health security agency, the UKHSA will anticipate threats to health and help build the nation's readiness, defences and health security to lead strong and sustainable global, national, regional and local partnerships designed to save lives, protect the nation from public health threats, and reduce inequalities.

UK Health Security Agency, 10 South Colonnade, London, E14 4PU
www.gov.uk/ukhsa

*Prepared and updated by UKHSA South East Health Protection Team.
September 2026*

For queries relating to this document, please contact
SE.AcuteResponse@ukhsa.gov.uk

Further resources

Cold weather

- Action cards for health and social care: [Cold weather and health: action cards - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

COVID-19

- Guidance: [COVID-19 supplement to the infection prevention and control resource for adult social care - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)
- Information about the COVID-19 vaccination: [Coronavirus vaccine](#)
- Posters – see [Campaign Resource Centre \(dhsc.gov.uk\)](#)
- Information on eligibility and booking vaccine: [Book Covid \(nhs.uk\)](#)

Flu

- Information about the Flu vaccination: [Flu vaccination: who should have it this winter and why - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)
- Leaflet – Flu leaflet for people with learning disability: [Flu vaccination: easy-read flu vaccination resources - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)
- Posters – see [Campaign Resource Centre \(dhsc.gov.uk\)](#)
- Patient antiviral information template – see below. For use as directed by your HPT in the event of a flu outbreak requiring antivirals
- Information on eligibility and booking vaccine: [Book flu \(nhs.uk\)](#)

Norovirus

- Hand hygiene guidance: [IPC quick guide for care workers – hand hygiene](#)
- Stop norovirus spreading poster: [Stop norovirus spreading](#)

Pneumococcal disease

- Information about the pneumococcal vaccine: [Pneumococcal vaccination \(nhs.uk\)](#)

RSV (respiratory syncytial virus)

- Guidance: RSV vaccine for older adults: [Your guide to the RSV vaccine for older adults](#)

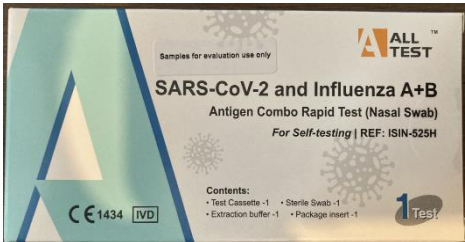
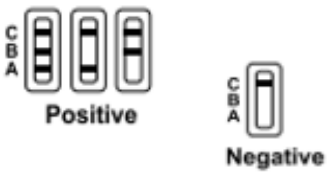
Shingles

- Information on eligibility and benefits of vaccination for adults: [Shingles vaccination for adults](#)

Visiting guidance

- Guidance to support safer visiting as per new CQC fundamental standard (Regulation 9A) on visiting in care homes: [Supporting safer visiting in care homes during infectious illness outbreaks](#)

How to use and report combo rapid flu and COVID-19 LFD tests for flu-like outbreaks among care home residents

Step 1 You have received 10 combo rapid LFD kits in the post. Store these with the instructions on how to use them. 	Step 2 If 2 or more residents develop flu-like illness within 5 days of each other (possible outbreak), use combo rapid LFDs (one on each ill resident up to a total of 5 tests) according to pack instructions. 	Step 3 Once you have taken the nasal swab, mixed it with the fluid and added drops on the LFD (3 drops per circle above each window), wait for 10 mins for lines to appear (as per pack instructions). 
Step 4 Check the test has worked. Ensure each window has a control line showing (line next to C). If not, (like below) the test did not work. If it did not work repeat with a new LFD. 	Step 5 Check if it is flu. If it is flu, the CBA window will show at least two lines. One C line and one A or B line or all three lines (even if a weak line). No A or B line means no flu. 	Step 6 Check if its COVID-19. If it is COVID there will be at least two lines in the CT window. No T line means no COVID. 
Step 7 As per usual practice, we only recommend testing the first few unwell residents when an outbreak is suspected – so five of the ten tests will be enough to confirm whether flu or COVID-19 is causing the outbreak. If you have tested 4 or fewer unwell residents, and the test results are negative, repeat the tests on these residents the next day and test any residents with new symptoms up to a maximum of 5 tests in total.	Step 8 Report your outbreak and your test results via the Report an outbreak webpage. Report all your test results – both positive and negative.  The local Health Protection Team/another organisation will contact you if you have a 'flu outbreak to advise on any actions needed to further protect residents and staff and to ensure the unwell residents receive the correct medicines. If only one person has flu and no other residents are unwell (no outbreak) – contact the GP.	Step 9 If any residents are ill with COVID-19 only, seek clinical advice if the resident is eligible for treatment. Information on eligibility can be found here: https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/covid-19/treatments-for-covid-19/ If residents have flu-like illness and do not have flu or COVID, contact the GP.
Next steps Once you have reported your test results via the Report an outbreak webpage, you will receive a new set of tests in two weeks.		

For more information see <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/report-an-outbreak-of-acute-respiratory-infection-in-an-adult-social-care-setting>



If any residents are severely unwell, seek urgent medical care via GP, NHS 111 or 999



UK Health
Security
Agency

Flu and COVID-19 outbreaks

South East England adult social care residential settings

Do 2 or more service users have the following symptoms within 5 days of each other?



Fever of
37.8°C
or above



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

- cough
- runny nose or congestion
- sore throat
- sneezing
- loss or change of taste/smell
- hoarseness
- shortness of breath
- wheezing
- chest pain



Sudden
decline in
physical or
mental ability

If yes, you might have an **outbreak** of COVID-19, flu, or other acute respiratory infection (ARI).



Support residents with symptoms to stay away from others; send staff with symptoms home



Test symptomatic service users with UKHSA supplied Combination Flu and COVID-19 LFDs. Residents eligible for COVID-19 treatments should be tested with a COVID-19 LFD available for free on the NHS from participating pharmacies.



Fill in the **Report an outbreak** tool to obtain advice.

Our CQC Location ID:.....
Combination LFD tests kept in:

.....

Report your ARI outbreak:

Complete the web-based Report an Outbreak Tool via
<https://forms.ukhsa.gov.uk/ReportAnOutbreak>

OR use the QR CODE



The UKHSA South East health protection team will review the information you submit and provide advice via email or a phone call to help manage the outbreak. **Antivirals for confirmed or suspected flu outbreaks are most effective when started early.**