



September 2019

To: Managers of nursing and residential homes and hospices

Dear Matron / Manager

WINTER READINESS 2019-2020

We are writing ahead of the approaching winter, to assist you in preparing for the season in order to reduce the spread of infection and disruption to your services.

A selection of useful documents (Winter Readiness Pack) is available on the following website:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/south/info-professional/public-health/infection-winter/>

Please do have a look as many of the documents have been updated this year. Please also make sure that all your care home staff are aware and familiar with this pack.

It may be worth printing off and ensuring easy access to:

- 1) Checklist for flu preparedness
- 2) Checklist for norovirus preparedness
- 3) The "Care Home Pack"

And pinning up one or more of the posters in rotation over time.

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 gut 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 shortcomings in infection control practices.

Flu, in particular, can cause serious illness (including death) in elderly care home residents. Last winter between Oct-April, there were 154 outbreaks of Influenza-like-illness (ILI) in SW care homes.

It is important not to delay recognition and reporting of outbreaks to the Health Protection Team (HPT) so that we can support you by ensuring appropriate management and public health action to reduce the likelihood of further spread. A PHE audit of outbreaks from the winter season 2018-19 showed that there was often a delay in reporting of outbreaks to the HPT. Only 36% (of 105 outbreaks audited) were reported to the HPT within 3 days. There was a delay of greater than one week for 23% of outbreaks.

It is also important to note that flu in the elderly can often be mistaken for primary bacterial chest infections and then treated inappropriately with antibiotics. Out of 55

laboratory confirmed outbreaks audited, at least 40 of these (73%) were initially treated by GPs as primary bacterial chest infections. It is often the care home which has oversight of several different patients from different general practices being treated for bacterial chest infections. If this is the case, the care home should think of flu and should call the HPT.

We have prepared a number of documents that we hope will help you prepare for the forthcoming season and avoid illness in residents and staff and disruption to your services.

The key messages are:

1. **Be prepared** – go through the attached checklists for flu and norovirus and ensure you are prepared in terms of infection control procedures and vaccination
2. **Recognise outbreaks** – the Care Home Pack will give you information on how to recognise outbreaks. You should be particularly aware of influenza and norovirus/gastroenteritis in the forthcoming winter season.
3. **Report outbreaks** to your local health protection team 24/7 -
Tel: 0300 303 8162 Option 1, Option 1

Please have at hand;

- Numbers of affected residents and staff
- Date of onset of the first and most recent case
- Signs, symptoms and duration of symptoms
- Locations of affected cases, e.g. one wing or all areas are affected
- Any hospitalised or deceased cases
- Details of any samples taken

Hospital transfers:

Please do not transfer patients/residents if they have gastroenteritis or flu or you have an outbreak in your home unless it is absolutely necessary. If a patient/resident needs to be transferred to hospital, please let the ambulance and admitting ward know that there is an outbreak in the home. They can then take precautions to prevent spread in the hospital and minimise the impact on the health and social care system.

We would greatly appreciate it if you could make your staff aware of the information in this pack and also forward the information on to the agencies that provide you with temporary staff.

We thank you for your support in helping to avoid further spread in the community. If you have any queries about this letter, please contact your PHE Centre.

Yours sincerely



Dr Fiona Neely
Consultant in Health Protection
SW Centre Health Protection Team
Public Health England



Dr Julie Yates
Consultant in Public Health
Screening and Immunisation Team
Public Health England

Documents are available on <https://www.england.nhs.uk/south/info-professional/public-health/infection-winter/>

They include:

- A toolkit for maximising influenza vaccination in care homes-
- A template for recording staff flu vaccination
- Checklists for flu and norovirus preparedness in care homes
- The PHE SW HPT "Care Home Pack" – a guide to IPC, common infectious diseases and recognition and management of outbreaks
- SW Risk Assessment Guide for Care Homes admitting residents with infections (to be added at the end of sept/beginning Oct – currently in draft)
- National guidance for care homes on IPC
- National guidance on managing norovirus in care homes
- Information leaflet on flu for health and social care staff
- Outbreaks of flu in care homes poster
- Stop Norovirus Spreading poster
- Hand hygiene poster
- "Catch it, Bin it, Kill it" poster