



Information Sheet A: What is an Outbreak?

What is an outbreak?

An outbreak of an infectious disease is when there are more people with the disease than you might normally expect. The outbreak can be in a local area, or in a setting like a care home or school. The criteria for declaring an outbreak can be slightly different depending on the setting.

What is a care home COVID-19 outbreak?

A COVID-19 outbreak in the care home is declared when there are two or more staff, residents or visitors testing positive within 14 days of each other. The cases must either have been in close contact in the care home or any activity/travel related to the care home, or there must be nowhere else they could have become infected.

If the cases have not been in close contact, or they probably became infected outside of the care home, this is called a COVID-19 cluster.

Why does an outbreak matter?

If the outbreak is not controlled, the number of people getting infected will increase very quickly. Although most people will only have a mild illness, some may have worse symptoms and could need hospital treatment. Having several residents who have Covid-19, and/or having several members of staff off sick or self-isolating at the same time, could have a very big impact on the care home.

It is also possible that the care home outbreak could spread into other settings or the wider community.

When is an outbreak over?

If 28 days pass without any new cases of COVID-19 in residents, staff and visitors, the outbreak is declared over. Clusters are finished after 14 days with no new cases.