

Controlling Outbreaks in Healthcare Facilities: What Visitors Need to Know

Outbreaks of illness in long-term care homes (LTCH) or other healthcare facilities can be very stressful for residents/patients, staff, visitors and family members. However for residents/patients, outbreaks can be more than just stressful, they can be life threatening. For the health and well being of residents/patients it is important to control and stop outbreaks as quickly as possible. Follow these steps to help stop the spread of illness:

Check-in at the nursing station

Control measures may change during an outbreak. Staff at the nursing station will provide you with information on control measures that are being used at that time, and help answer your questions.

Keep your hands clean

Wash hands using soap and warm water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer:

- Immediately when you enter the facility and as you leave.
- Before entering a resident's/patient's room and as you leave a resident's/patient's room.
- Before and after feeding a resident/patient or providing care to a resident/patient.
- Before eating.
- After using the washroom.

Do not visit if you are ill

Visiting a resident/patient when you are not feeling well puts **everyone** in the facility at risk. Keep infants and children at home if they are not feeling well. Do not visit if you have a cold or any of the following symptoms:

- Fever, cough, runny nose, sneezing, stuffy nose, sore throat.
- Diarrhea, upset stomach, vomiting, or nausea.

If a resident/patient is ill, visit in the resident's/patient's room only

Ill residents/patients should remain in their rooms. Avoid taking an ill resident/patient to a common area during your visit.

If visiting a well resident/patient, follow the facility's infection prevention and control instructions.

Do not visit more than one resident/patient

After visiting a resident/patient, leave the facility immediately. To protect yourself, avoid common areas (e.g., dining room).

Get your flu shot (influenza vaccine)

Influenza can cause serious complications such as pneumonia or death for the elderly.

You can pass influenza to others **before you start to show any symptoms**. To protect yourself and your family, get your flu shot.

Even though residents of LTCH receive annual flu vaccine, science shows there is waning immunity in the elderly. Therefore, to further protect residents, it is important for caregivers, families and visitors to be immunized with flu vaccine each year.

Follow the facility's infection prevention and control instructions

The Halton Region Health Department consults with facilities to discuss ways to control and prevent outbreaks.

Follow the facility's instructions for precautions or personal protective equipment (e.g., gloves, masks, eye protection or gowns), if required.

If followed by everyone, control measures can control an outbreak.

Who can I call for more information?

For more information about controlling outbreaks in healthcare facilities talk to a health care provider in the facility, or call the Halton Region Health Department at the number below.

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