

GUIDANCE ON COMMUNICATIONS DURING COMMUNICABLE DISEASE OUTBREAKS IN NSW AGED CARE FACILITIES – 2015

Purpose

The purpose of this guidance document is to clarify how information relating to an outbreak of an infectious disease within Australian Commonwealth subsidised residential aged care facilities should be shared between the NSW Health Protection Service and the Australian Aged Care Quality Agency (AACQA).

Target Audience

- Australian Aged Care Quality Agency (AACQA)
- NSW Public Health Units
- Health Protection NSW – Communicable Diseases Branch

Background: Institutional outbreak notification in NSW

The NSW Public Health Act 2010 requires the notification of a number of infectious diseases. These include influenza and rotavirus, two common causes of institutional outbreaks. Norovirus is not a notifiable disease but is a common cause of institutional outbreaks of gastroenteritis,

In addition, hospital and medical practitioners are required to notify *Gastroenteritis among people of any age in an institution* (for example, among persons in educational or residential institutions), and *Foodborne illness in two or more related cases*.

NSW Health recommends that aged care and other residential care facilities should promptly notify their local Public Health Unit of suspected communicable disease outbreaks, particularly outbreaks of gastroenteritis or respiratory illness.

- A gastroenteritis outbreak is defined as two or more cases of vomiting or diarrhoea over a 24 hour period in residents or staff.
- An influenza outbreak is usually defined as three or more cases of influenza-like illness (or other acute respiratory illness) over a 72 hour period in residents or staff.

Background: roles and responsibilities in Aged Care Facility Outbreaks

NSW Public Health Units:

Play a primary role in providing support and advice to aged care services and other institutions to identify the cause, appropriately manage communicable disease outbreaks and minimise the risk of further transmission of illness to residents and staff.

Australian Aged Care Quality Agency (AACQA):

Responsible for monitoring performance of aged care facilities against the Accreditation Standards including such matters as infection control.

Health Protection NSW – Communicable Diseases Branch

Play a statewide coordinating role in managing outbreaks in aged care services and other institutions, monitoring disease trends, supporting Public Health Units if required, policy development around outbreak prevention and management, and briefing senior officers and the Minister on contentious issues.

Outbreak Communication Steps

Step 1. Aged care service notifies their local Public Health Unit

Once an outbreak of gastroenteritis or suspected influenza has been identified by facility staff, notification of the outbreak should be made immediately to their local PHU.

If in the event the ACF notifies the AACQA (NSW & ACT) rather than notifying the PHU, then the AACQA (NSW & ACT) will advise the ACF to contact the relevant PHU.

Step 2. Public Health Unit notifies the Communicable Diseases Branch and the AACQA (NSW & ACT) by email

As part of its response to the outbreak notification, the PHU should complete the Institutional Outbreak Summary Form (see Attachment 1) and email it as an attachment to:

- Communicable Diseases Branch:
CDOncall@doh.health.nsw.gov.au or
enteric@doh.health.nsw.gov.au (for gastroenteritis / foodborne illness).
- The AACQA (NSW & ACT):
nsw_act@aacqa.gov.au

Step 3: Ongoing outbreak management by Public Health Unit

The local PHU has primary responsibility for advising and supporting the aged care facility to effectively manage the outbreak. The PHU will communicate regularly with the facility (often daily) until the outbreak is declared over.

Other agencies should avoid contacting the facility directly with additional questions or outbreak control advice, as this can lead to conflicting messages and diversion of facility staff from their core activities.

Should AACQA seek urgent information/communications in relation to the outbreak if possible should be directed to the Director of the PHU, unless otherwise indicated by the PHU. Ideally communications should occur through email updates as described below. On occasions however, the AACQA (NSW & ACT) may need to contact the facility to respond to urgent briefing requests or to fulfil responsibilities under the Australian Aged Care Quality Act 2013.

Step 4: Triggers for PHU to provide updates

The Public Health Unit should provide an update (to contacts listed in **Step 2**) when:

- There are contentious issues, for example the death of a resident suspected to be related to the outbreak, OR
- More than 50% of the residents in the facility are affected by the outbreak, OR
- There is some other major issue likely to raise concern among residents or their families.

During outbreaks with deaths or other contentious issues, the PHU may elect to direct all enquiries be made through the PHU Director.

Step 5: Public Health Unit notifies the end of the outbreak

Once the outbreak is declared over by the managing PHU, this information should be reported to the contacts listed in **Step 2**, and should include a brief summary of the outbreak.

All other reporting requirements for outbreaks should be finalised as per the PHU control guidelines and entered into NCIMS as per the reporting requirements.

AACQA (NSW & ACT) Interventions

Certain circumstances may require AACQA (NSW & ACT) to intervene more actively with the facility during an outbreak. These include:

- As a result of information received from PHU – for example, if the PHU feels the facility is not responding appropriately to the outbreak and or failing to comply with advice regarding infection control measures.
- Following a complaint or notification to the Aged Care Complaint Scheme.
- When triggers occur (as outlined in Step 4)
- If there are contentious issues

Under these circumstances, AACQA (NSW & ACT) should liaise with the Director of the managing PHU when possible. The Communicable Disease Branch can also assist if required.

Contact Details

AACQA (NSW & ACT)

- State Director: 02 96332099 OR nsw_act@aacqa.gov.au
- Assessment Manager: 02 96332099 OR nsw_act@aacqa.gov.au

NSW Public Health Units

- PHU Contact List -
<http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/publichealth/Infectious/phus.asp>

Health Protection NSW - Communicable Diseases Branch

- Communicable Diseases On Call Officer:
02 9391 9195 (BH) / 0419 230 683 (AH)
CDOncall@doh.health.nsw.gov.au
- Enterics Team:
02 9391 9561
enteric@doh.health.nsw.gov.au

Attachment 1: Institutional Outbreak Summary Form

Institutional Outbreak Summary Form

Institution details	Type of facility	
	Date reported by institution	
	Number of areas in institution	
	Number of areas affected	
Case details	Onset date - first case	
	Onset date - last case	
	First case resident or staff	
	Number cases	
	Number at risk	
	Symptoms	
	Number recovered to date	
	Any hospitalised cases	
Any deaths		
Investigation	Food service provision details	
	Pathogen source	
	Viral gastro suspected?	
	Number stool samples taken	
	Number of respiratory samples collected	
Public Health Action	Infection control measures	
	Other notes	