

## Prepare Now to Prevent and Manage Communicable Disease Outbreaks in Your Facility

Multiple outbreaks of communicable diseases have been identified in nursing facilities across the state in recent months, including:

- Mumps
- Influenza
- Viral Gastroenteritis

Nursing facilities must be aware of the potential for outbreaks of any communicable disease, and respond appropriately when and if they occur.

An outbreak is defined as “the occurrence of cases of disease in excess of what would normally be expected in a defined community, geographic area or season.”<sup>1</sup> In practice, particularly in a long-term care facility, this would usually be two or more cases of a specific disease or illness; however in some situations, a single case could represent an outbreak.

### Preventing and Managing an Outbreak in a Nursing Facility

The facility must have a surveillance plan in place that allows staff to quickly identify an outbreak and implement procedures to prevent further transmission to residents and staff.<sup>2</sup>

Staff members who are suspected of having a communicable disease should also be evaluated by their employee health nurse, and must be excluded from working until cleared by their healthcare provider (in conjunction with the local health authority). In addition, the facility’s surveillance program should include monitoring of staff members for signs and symptoms of illness that could represent additional cases. The facility’s policies and procedures must include “the circumstances under which the facility must prohibit employees with a communicable disease or infected skin lesions from direct contact with residents or their food, if direct contact will transmit the disease.”<sup>3</sup>

If possible, residents who are infected with like illnesses or organisms can be cohorted and cared for by the same personnel until the risk of further transmission is over. The facility must have policies and procedures regarding hand hygiene<sup>4</sup>, as well as standard and transmission-based precautions<sup>5</sup>, and facility staff must be trained on their use.

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<sup>1</sup> World Health Organization (WHO) [http://www.who.int/topics/disease\\_outbreaks/en/](http://www.who.int/topics/disease_outbreaks/en/)

<sup>2</sup> CFR 483.80(a)(2)(i)

<sup>3</sup> CFR 483.80(a)(2)(v)

<sup>4</sup> CFR 483.80(a)(2)(vi)

<sup>5</sup> CFR 483.80(a)(2)(iii)

There are many different control measures facilities can implement to help prevent and stop the spread of diseases, depending on the type of outbreak a facility is dealing with. The Infection Prevention and Control staff should be involved from the beginning and help determine the appropriate measures for the outbreak.

### **Vaccine Preventable Diseases**

Regulations and customary practice in long-term care settings have focused primarily on the provision of the influenza and pneumococcal vaccines. Facilities should continue to encourage all residents and staff to take the annual influenza vaccine unless a medical contraindication is present. Residents should also receive the pneumococcal vaccine (PPSV23 and PCV13) as recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).<sup>6</sup>

However, a number of other vaccine-preventable diseases could impact nursing facility staff and residents and each facility should be aware of the potential for an outbreak of these illnesses. This could include, but is not limited to, diseases such as mumps, measles, chickenpox, or shingles.

### **Specific recommendations include:**

- Screen all staff for their current immunization status. Ensure staff members have been fully immunized against mumps, measles, rubella (MMR), varicella, or zoster (depending on age). If vaccination status is unknown, check for other evidence of immunity (i.e. titer).
- If immunization status is unknown, and/or titers reveal an employee is not immune, the facility should encourage him/her to receive the necessary vaccines.
- Employee health records should reflect the employee's immunization status, and any refusals of vaccines. In the event of an outbreak of a vaccine-preventable disease, public health authorities will rely on accurate employee records to determine immunity status.
- Each resident's immunization status should be evaluated as well; in addition to the influenza/pneumococcal vaccines, the facility should try to determine each resident's status for the recommended vaccines (ex: zoster, MMR, etc.).
- A consolidated record of a resident's immunization status should be available in the clinical record, and a copy of the immunization record should accompany the resident if he/she is transferred to another facility/hospital.

If an outbreak of a vaccine-preventable disease occurs, the facility would then be able to quickly identify staff and residents who are at highest risk, and take appropriate measures to prevent transmission. Adult vaccine schedules are available on the CDC

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<sup>6</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/00047135.htm>

website: <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/schedules/downloads/adult/adult-schedule-easy-read.pdf>.

## Reporting Requirements

Per the Texas Notifiable Conditions list, all outbreaks must be reported to the most local public health jurisdiction. If the county in which the facility is located does not have a local health department, the report would be made to the Department of State Health Services (DSHS) regional health department. Contact information for your public health authority may be found on the DSHS website:

<https://www.dshs.texas.gov/idcu/investigation/conditions/contacts/>. A full list of notifiable conditions and the time-frame for reporting is also available on the DSHS website: <https://dshs.texas.gov/idcu/investigation/conditions/>.

In addition, all outbreaks of a communicable disease or an infectious illness in a nursing facility must be reported to the Department of Aging and Disability Services (DADS). According to **Provider Letter 14-13 – Abuse, Neglect, Exploitation and Other Incidents that Must Be Reported**:

“CONDITIONS THAT POSE A THREAT TO RESIDENT HEALTH AND SAFETY

Any situation that poses a threat to residents, staff or the public must be reported, including situations for which the police or the local fire authority must be notified or summoned in order to maintain safety.”

While the Provider Letter does not explicitly mention outbreaks of communicable diseases or infectious illnesses, DADS Regulatory Services Division has confirmed that the requirement to report apply to these situations.

The Provider Letter outlines the procedure for making the initial report to DADS, as well as the report of the facility’s investigations. Provider Letter 14-13 can be viewed at <https://www.dads.state.tx.us/providers/communications/2014/letters/PL2014-13.pdf>.