



# Tips for Successful Outbreak Management

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Respiratory and gastrointestinal outbreaks continue to represent a significant burden of illness in Ontario’s Long-Term Care Homes (LTCH) and Retirement Homes. Significant mortality may also be associated with these outbreaks. . Many outbreaks can be prevented or have their impact mitigated through intentional, knowledgeable and rapid identification and management of cases. This can help to minimize the spread of disease, prevent illness as well as hospitalization and death. Take some time and become familiar with the following outbreak management tools developed by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC).

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**Public Health Role:**

Public Health's role is to provide assistance and expertise in the prevention, management and control of outbreaks, thus reducing illness, hospitalizations, deaths and cost. Health-care facilities and institutions are legally required to report outbreaks to their local Public Health Unit. Timely reporting results in rapid response, therefore increasing the benefits of control measures.

**Declaring Outbreaks:**

- In consultation with the facility the Medical Officer of Health or designate will declare an outbreak in the facility.
- Outbreaks can only be declared over by MOH, or designate.

**Reporting a Suspect or Confirmed Outbreak**

- **Weekdays from 8:30am – 4:30pm contact the ID Helpline 519-376-9420 ext. 6**
- **Weekends, after-hours, holidays contact the Health Unit on-call 519-376-5420**

## Protocols and Reference Documents

Reference Documents are intended to be resources to assist both Public Health and facility staff to rapidly identify, control and manage outbreaks.

### Respiratory Outbreak Management

- [MOHLTC Control of Respiratory Infection Outbreaks in Long-Term Care Homes, November 2018](#)
- MOHLTC Infectious Disease Protocols:
  - [Appendix A: Respiratory Outbreak in Institutions and Public Hospitals, May 2018](#)
  - [Appendix B: Provincial Case Definitions Respiratory Outbreak in Institutions and Public Hospitals, May 2018](#)

### Gastrointestinal Outbreak Management

- [MOHLTC Recommendations for the Control of Gastroenteritis Outbreaks in Long-Term Care Homes, March 2018](#)
- MOHLTC Infectious Disease Protocols:
  - [Appendix A: Gastroenteritis, Outbreaks in Institutions and Public Hospitals, May 2018](#)
  - [Appendix B: Provincial Case Definitions Gastroenteritis Outbreaks in Institutions and Public Hospitals, May 2018](#)

### Public Health Ontario Provincial Infectious Disease Advisory Committee Resources

- [Public Health Ontario Provincial Infectious Disease Advisory Committee Best Practice Documents - Webpage](#)
- [Best Practice for Environmental Cleaning for Prevention and Control of Infections in All Health Care Settings, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, April 2018](#)

## **Respiratory Outbreak Definitions (Revised November 2018):**

### **Suspect respiratory infection outbreak definitions:**

- Two cases of acute respiratory tract illness (ARI) occurring within 48 hours with any common epidemiological link (e.g., unit, floor);  
**OR**
- One laboratory confirmed case of influenza

### **Confirmed respiratory infection outbreak definitions:**

- Two cases of acute respiratory tract illness (ARI) within 48 hours with any common epidemiological link (e.g., unit, floor), at least one of which must be lab confirmed;  
**OR**
- Three cases of acute respiratory illness (laboratory confirmation not necessary) occurring within 48 hours with any common epidemiological link (e.g., unit, floor)

## **Gastroenteritis Outbreaks Definitions (Revised May 2018):**

### **Suspected gastroenteritis outbreak definition:**

- If an outbreak is suspected, notify the local board of health to support with the investigation and management.

### **Confirmed gastroenteritis outbreak definitions:**

- **Two or more** cases meeting the case definition with a common epidemiological link (e.g., specific unit or floor, same caregiver) with initial onset within a 48 hour period.

**Case Definition** – Is dependent on the presenting signs and symptoms and circumstances. This can vary between outbreaks and also vary during an outbreak.

Symptoms must not be attributed to another cause (e.g. medication side effects, laxatives, diet or prior medical condition) and are not present or incubating upon admission and at least one of the following must be met:

- **Two or more** episodes of diarrhea (i.e. loose/watery bowel movements) within a 24-hour period;  
OR
- **Two or more** episodes of vomiting within a 24-hour period;  
OR
- **One or more** episodes of diarrhea **AND one or more** episodes of vomiting within a 24-hour period.

**Note: Outbreaks can exist outside the outbreak definition parameters.**

### Reporting / Communication:

- Notify Public Health as soon as an outbreak is suspected.
  - **Weekdays from 8:30am – 4:30pm contact the ID Helpline 519-376-9420 ext. 6**
  - **Weekends, after-hours, holidays contact the Health Unit on-call 519-376-5420**
- Effective communication between facility staff and Public Health is fundamental for successful outbreak management.
- Provide the name of the primary Infection Control Practitioner (ICP) at the facility or staff member responsible for the outbreak investigation along with person's phone number.
- Verify and confirm contact information for the facility and Public Health representative for weekends, after-hours, holidays and vacation.
- Daily communication is important for keeping Public Health aware of the outbreak status. This includes faxing line lists of both resident and staff daily. If the home notices a significant increase of illness during the outbreak they are encouraged to contact the Health Unit to discuss control measures.

### Outbreak Number:

- An outbreak number is given for tracking and reporting purposes within Public Health, Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, and the Laboratory.
- Public Health will provide the facility with an outbreak number, which is given for suspect or confirmed outbreaks. This number is to be used on any samples that are submitted to the lab. Lab samples are sent during suspect outbreaks and this is the reason for giving outbreak numbers when the outbreak is still in suspect.
- Whether the outbreak is in suspect or moved into confirmed, the same number that was assigned is still used.

### Line Lists:

- Line lists need to be **completed entirely** to provide a clear picture of the outbreak (onset dates, out of isolation, symptoms, samples collected).
- Fax the line lists to Public Health as soon as an outbreak is suspected. After this, line lists need to be completed and faxed daily to Public Health before 12:00 pm.
- **Do not remove** any residents from the line list without first discussing with Public Health. If for some reason someone is to be removed, a single line through their name is sufficient; do not use white-out or erasers.
- When listing a resident or staff member the symptom must be new, unusual or worse.
- Public Health's line lists and resources are available at:  
<https://www.publichealthgreybruce.on.ca/Your-Health/Infectious-Diseases/Professional-Resources/Outbreak-Management>

**Case Definitions:**

- The case definition should be developed for each individual outbreak based on its characteristics, reviewed during the course of the outbreak, and modified if necessary, to ensure that the majority of cases are captured by the definition.
- When line listing residents, care should be taken to rule out non-infectious causes of symptoms (such as laxative, underlying health condition, etc.). If it is unclear if a resident meets case definition, facilities may want to consider these residents as suspect cases and implement infection control measures to prevent potential transmission.

**Specimen Collection:**

- Public Health will provide an *Outbreak Number* for the investigation (even if the outbreak is a suspect).
- The Outbreak Number is to be recorded on all laboratory submission forms, for the outbreak only and as directed by Public Health staff.
- Communicate to Public Health that specimens have been collected and ensure appropriate residents are being tested (recent onset date and most classical presentation of illness suspected).
- Label specimens with at least two identifiers and include the outbreak number.
- Specimens collected are to be picked-up by our courier and sent to *Public Health Ontario Laboratory*. For courier pick-up times and locations, please speak with your Public Health representative.
- Refer to [Public Health Ontario](#) website for information regarding specimen collection and lab requisitions or call the PHOL Customer Service Centre at 416-235-6556/1-877-604-4567.

**Infection Control Measures:**

- **Implement outbreak control measures as soon as you suspect illness.**
- Visit the [Grey Bruce Health Unit](#) Outbreak Management webpage for additional resources.

**Outbreak Management Team (OMT):**

- OMT should include a representative from each department who have decision-making authority and a Public Health Unit representative.
- OMT should review line lists, case and outbreak definitions daily to ensure all members of the OMT have a common understanding of the surveillance criteria and outbreak status.
- Review the current control measures being implemented and recommend any necessary modifications.
- Prepare/distribute internal communications to staff, residents, families and volunteers.

**References (or newest version as posted on the MOHLTC website):**

Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (November 2018). Control of Respiratory Infection Outbreaks in Long-Term Care Homes. Retrieved from [http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/oph\\_standards/reference.aspx](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/oph_standards/reference.aspx)

Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. Ontario Public Health Standards: Requirements for Programs, Services, and Accountability (Standards). Appendix B – Provincial Case Definitions for Diseases of Public Health Significance; Disease Respiratory Infection Outbreaks in Institutions and Public Hospitals, May 2018 Retrieved from [http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/oph\\_standards/docs/respiratory\\_outbreaks\\_cd.pdf](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/oph_standards/docs/respiratory_outbreaks_cd.pdf)

Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (May 2018). Recommendations for the Control of Gastroenteritis Outbreaks in Long Term Care Homes. Retrieved from [http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/oph\\_standards/reference.aspx](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/oph_standards/reference.aspx)

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