

Frequently asked Questions – Outbreak Management

Most questions that arise during an outbreak can be answered by reviewing the outbreak information package; however, the following FAQs provide further clarification.

Question	Answer
1. Why is it ok for residents to gather together for meals but not for social activities? Are meals in a common dining room considered a social activity?	Meals are essential for all residents and cannot be cancelled. It is not a social activity. Meals are set up to reduce the spread of illness as much as possible, e.g., residents are gathered for meal time only. Common touch items have been removed from tables and alcohol hand based rub is available prior to eating, etc.
2. Can nutritional areas/kitchenettes remain open during an outbreak?	No. Any opportunity for a group to gather increases the risk of spreading illness.
3. Can residents leave the facility during an outbreak?	Yes, but if residents are symptomatic, we ask that they please remain in their room and postpone trips that are not essential.
4. Are essential/medical services restricted during an outbreak?	No. Any service essential to residents' health and wellness such as one-to-one medical care is permitted. If residents have symptoms, those who care for them must wear gown, gloves and mask so that they do not spread illness to others.
5. Are volunteer activities/group recreation therapy cancelled during an outbreak?	Activities that are not medically necessary are usually cancelled at the discretion of Infection Prevention & Control (IPC). Any opportunity for a group to gather increases the risk of spreading illness.
6. Why does a resident have to stay in his/her room?	Anyone who has symptoms can spread illness throughout the facility. Even when residents have recovered from their illness and are no longer symptomatic, they still may be able to spread the illness. They are required to wait a certain number of days without symptoms before they are no longer isolated (as directed by IPC). The facility is still required to provide all the essential services that it normally provides such as tray service for meals and one-to-one care. Those who care for residents must wear gown, gloves and mask so that staff do not spread illness to others.
7. Are visitors restricted during an outbreak?	We do not recommend having visitors but if residents would like to have visitors during an outbreak, we ask that they please speak to the facility about precautions that should be made in order to reduce risks as much as possible. Any opportunity for a group to gather increases the risk of spreading illness.
8. Why are staff members wearing a gown/gloves/ mask when they provide care to a resident?	Anyone who has symptoms can spread illness throughout the facility. Those who care for residents must wear gown, gloves and mask so that staff do not spread illness to others. Even when residents have recovered from their illness and are no longer symptomatic, they still may be able to spread the illness.
9. When will the outbreak be over?	This all depends on residents, family members, visitors and the facility. If everyone does their part to stop the spread of disease – restricting group activities, washing hands, staying in their room when they are sick, limiting visitors – then new illnesses stop and the spread of disease stops. Once there are specific number of days (depending on the disease organism) with no new illness, the outbreak can be declared over.

10. Can residents leave the facility to attend medical appointments in the community?	Yes.
11. Can family members take residents home during an outbreak?	Yes; however, family members should speak to the facility to get informed about the potential for spread of illness throughout the household. If the resident is symptomatic when they return to the facility, the resident will be isolated.
12. Facilities have public laundry rooms for resident use. Can residents use these facilities if they are symptomatic?	No, only well residents are to use public laundry rooms during an outbreak.
13. Does the use of alcohol based hand rub eliminate the requirement for proper hand washing?	No. Proper handwashing and hand hygiene is the most effective way to reduce the spread of illness.
14. Can the facility host meetings, group gatherings, and learning fairs during an outbreak?	No.
15. Will the events for holidays (Christmas, New Year's etc.) be cancelled?	Large gatherings increase the risk of spreading disease. Activities that are not medically necessary are usually cancelled at the discretion of IPC. There are some limited circumstances when an event may be allowed but adequate infection control measures must be followed. If residents have arranged a private event, please speak to the facility first before proceeding.
16. Are ambulance workers restricted from coming to a facility in outbreak? Are hospitals restricted in accepting, assessing and treating a resident who is coming from a facility in outbreak?	No. Hospitals and paramedics cannot refuse to care for residents if residents are ill and need to go to the Emergency even if the facility is in outbreak. There are Infection Prevention and Control measures that they can use to help prevent spread of illness.

Adopted from Environmental Public Health.