

Preventing infection in Care Homes Factsheet

Information for residents and visitors

Why is infection prevention and control in a care home important?

The prevention and control of infection in a care home is important to protect the health, wellbeing and safety of residents, visitors and staff.

The risks of infection increase when people live together. In a care home, residents can become especially vulnerable to infection due to their age, other illnesses or conditions and their diminished immune systems.

If a resident does develop an infection, it can cause serious health problems, often making existing conditions worse. In some people, infections have effects on quality of life and sadly, can result in death.

How is infection spread in a care home setting?

Some infections can spread through the air, such as COVID-19 and influenza. However, most infections, including MRSA, COVID-19, influenza and viral gastroenteritis, easily spread via:

- Contaminated hands of residents, staff and visitors
- Contaminated surfaces and equipment

Top tips for residents to prevent infection in a care home

- Always wash your hands after using the toilet and either wash your hands or use hand wipes or sanitiser before eating and drinking.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when sneezing or coughing and use a tissue for blowing your nose. Always dispose of the tissue immediately after use and then either wash your hands or use a hand wipe or sanitiser. If you don't have a tissue cough or sneeze into the crook of your elbow.
- Try to keep surfaces in your room free from clutter so that they can be thoroughly cleaned. If you're concerned about the standard of cleanliness, please tell the person in charge.
- If you have a confirmed or suspected infection, you may need to be isolated in your room until you are no longer infectious to prevent spread to others. This can be a frightening or frustrating experience. If this happens to you, please share how you feel with staff so that they can provide you with extra support.
- If you need to take antibiotics, then complete the course as instructed by your health care professional. Remember that antibiotics don't work for a cold or flu and taking antibiotics when you don't need them puts you at risk of developing antimicrobial resistant infections.

How can visitors to a care home help prevent infection?

Visitors can also help prevent infection by:

- Using the hand sanitiser provided when entering and leaving the care home. In some circumstances, they may be advised by care home staff to wash their hands instead of using the sanitiser
- Not visiting if they have a confirmed or suspected infection. For example, if they have diarrhoea, vomiting, an unexplained rash, fever or respiratory symptoms

Where can you get further information?

Please speak to the care home staff who can obtain further information from your GP, local Community Infection Prevention and Control or UK Health Security Agency Team.