



Community Infection Prevention and Control Policy for General Practice

(also suitable for adoption by other healthcare providers,
e.g. Podiatry)

Outbreaks of communicable disease

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This Policy has been adopted by:

Organisation:

Signature: Name:

Job title:

Adoption date:

Review date:

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Contents

Page

1. Introduction.....	4
2. Key personnel.....	4
3. Recognising the problem	4
4. Declaration of an outbreak.....	5
5. Preliminary investigation.....	5
6. Objectives of the Incident Management Team.....	6
7. Incident Management Team membership.....	6
8. Initial meeting	7
9. Subsequent meetings	7
10. Communications.....	8
11. Conclusion of outbreak	8
12. Infection Prevention and Control resources, education and training.....	8
13. References	9

OUTBREAKS OF COMMUNICABLE DISEASE

1. Introduction

This guidance is designed to support and promote good practice in the investigation, management and control of infectious disease outbreaks or incidents, which may have significant public health implications. Examples include outbreaks of PVL-SA, food poisoning, such as Salmonella, *E. Coli* O157 infection, or a single case of a rare or serious disease, e.g. smallpox, Ebola. Each control problem will be unique, requiring specific measures to deal with individual circumstances. For these reasons, the enclosed guidance should be regarded as a template for action, describing key principles and good practice in the management and control of communicable disease.

When caring for patients in relation to any new or emerging infections, staff should refer to the national infection prevention and control guidance.

2. Key personnel

Responsibility for responding to outbreaks of communicable infection occurring in the community lies with the Consultants in Communicable Disease Control (CCDC). The CCDCs are based at regional offices of the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA).

Local Community Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) or UKHSA Teams deal with day-to-day advice and support to a wide range of community settings where infection control is important and, on occasions, support local UKHSA Teams in responding to outbreaks.

3. Recognising the problem

Effective control depends on early recognition and timely intervention. Practice staff should be aware of symptoms **amongst both patients and staff**, which may indicate a possible outbreak, for example:

- Cough and/or fever may indicate influenza
- Diarrhoea and/or vomiting may indicate norovirus or food poisoning
- Skin lesions/rash may indicate scabies

If there is cause to suspect a problem, contact your local Community IPC or UKHSA Team.

Other infections which need to be recognised and reported to your CCDC include:

- Notifiable diseases, refer to the 'Notifiable diseases Policy for General Practice'
- Episodes of possible transmission of infection
- Infections with a significant risk of transmission of infection (contact your local Community IPC or UKHSA Team if in doubt)
- Serious and unusual infections, e.g. a single case of diphtheria, polio, etc

Definition of an outbreak

- Two or more cases of patients or staff with the same infection or symptoms linked in time or place.
- A greater than expected rate of infection compared with usual background levels for the place and time where the outbreak has occurred.
- A single case of a rare or serious disease, e.g. diphtheria, botulism, rabies, viral haemorrhagic fever, polio, smallpox or Ebola.
- A suspected, anticipated or actual event involving microbial or chemical contamination of food or water.

Suspected outbreaks must be notified to the local Community IPC, UKHSA Team or CCDC at the earliest opportunity.

4. Declaration of an outbreak

Locally confined outbreaks will usually be recognised and declared by the CCDC. Where appropriate, this will be following consultation with a Consultant Microbiologist or senior Environmental Health Officer.

5. Preliminary investigation

Upon notification, the CCDC will commence an initial investigation. The purpose of this is to determine:

- Whether a problem/outbreak exists
- Nature and extent of the incident/outbreak
- Immediate control measures
- Identify those who are ill
- Ensure those affected receive appropriate care
- Control the source of infection
- Contain the infection

It is the responsibility of the CCDC to decide if the episode is of sufficient significance to require special arrangements for investigation and management, e.g. an Incident Management Team or triggering of the major incident plan. It is, therefore, crucial that the

CCDC is informed at the earliest stage that a significant outbreak is suspected.

6. Objectives of the Incident Management Team

To bring together relevant people with appropriate skills to manage the problem:

- To ensure appropriate arrangements are in place to care for those affected
- To investigate and control source or possible source of infection
- To limit further cases
- To communicate with the public and the media
- To monitor effectiveness of measures taken
- To review the effectiveness of the control of the incident and develop systems and procedures to prevent further occurrence of similar episodes
- To provide clear communication with patients, the general public, other healthcare professionals and the media

7. Incident Management Team membership

Core members of the Incident Management Team will be:

- Consultant in Communicable Disease Control (CCDC)
- Community IPC Team
- Consultant Microbiologist
- Practice Manager
- General Practitioner from the Practice
- Environmental Health Officer

Other members may be co-opted as required and these may include any of the following:

- Consultant Epidemiologist
- Public Health Director
- Representative from the Integrated Care Board (ICB)
- Press/Public Relations Agency
- Infectious Diseases Physician
- Community Pharmacist
- Community Paediatrician
- Water Company Representative
- State Veterinary Service

- Social Services Manager
- Residential Home Staff
- Emergency Planning Officer
- Care Quality Commission
- Health and Safety Executive
- Environment Agency

This list is not exhaustive. In determining which managers are appropriate members of the Incident Management Team, it should be remembered that they must be of sufficient seniority to make decisions and implement actions on behalf of the department or organisation they represent.

8. Initial meeting

The first meeting will usually address the following:

- Agree lead investigating authority and chair of the group (unless the major incident plan has been triggered this will be the CCDC on behalf of UKHSA)
- Examine available evidence
- Ensure appropriate and satisfactory care of those individuals affected
- Define measures necessary to identify and control the source of infection
- Define measures necessary to contain the spread of the outbreak
- Identify the measures necessary to monitor the effectiveness of containment and control procedures adopted
- Identify any additional expert assistance which might be required
- Identify personnel and other resources necessary to manage the outbreak
- Define responsibilities for communications to the public, press and other organisations and individuals

9. Subsequent meetings

The Incident Management Team will continue to meet as appropriate. The CCDC will be responsible for supplying interim information to the local statutory NHS body. The Environmental Health Officers (EHOs) will be responsible for supplying interim information to the local authority.

10. Communications

The CCDC will liaise with other agencies as necessary. These may include:

- Local UKHSA Team
- Community Paediatricians
- Appropriate managers of relevant Community Services
- Social Services
- Department of Education

The CCDC will coordinate the release of information to the public and the media in liaison and agreement with any other agency which may be involved.

The CCDC will, where appropriate because of possible wider implications of the incident, inform the following of developments in the absence of direct representation on the Incident Management Team:

- UKHSA
- UKHSA colleagues in neighbouring areas where the incident may have an impact

11. Conclusion of outbreak

The investigations may end inconclusively. The chair of the Incident Management Team will make the decision on closure of the incident. A debriefing meeting should be held to:

- Review management of the incident
- Identify problems or shortcomings
- Revise the incident plan as required
- Make recommendations to reduce the chance of recurrence
- Agree the final report

The chair will provide a report for the ICB and UKHSA.

12. Infection Prevention and Control resources, education and training

The Community IPC Team have produced a wide range of innovative educational and IPC resources designed to assist your General Practice in achieving compliance with the *Health and Social Care Act 2008: code of practice on the prevention and control of infection and related guidance* and CQC registration requirements.

These resources are either free to download from the website or available at a minimal

cost covering administration and printing:

- 27 IPC Policy documents for General Practice
- Preventing Infection Workbook: Guidance for General Practice
- IPC CQC assessment preparation Pack for General Practice
- IPC audit tools, posters, leaflets and factsheets
- IPC Bulletin for General Practice Staff

In addition, we hold educational study events in North Yorkshire.

Further information on these high quality evidence-based resources is available at www.infectionpreventioncontrol.co.uk.

13. References

Department of Health and Social Care (Updated December 2022) *Health and Social Care Act 2008: code of practice on the prevention and control of infections and related guidance*

Hawker et al, (2019) *Communicable Disease Control and Health Protection Handbook* 4th edition

UK Health Security Agency (Updated September 2025) *Communicable Disease Outbreak Management guidance: principles to support local health protection systems*

UK Health Security Agency (Updated April 2025) *Notifiable organisms and how to report them*