Guidance on outbreaks of Influenza in care homes

Do 2 or more residents have the following symptoms?
Fever of 37.8°C or above
OR
Sudden decline in physical or mental ability
PLUS
New onset or acute worsening of one or more of these symptoms:
• Cough (with or without sputum)
• Sore throat
• Hoarseness
• Shortness of breath

If you notice 2 or more residents in the care home with these symptoms occurring within 48 hours, and their GP(s) confirm that it could be influenza:

It could be an outbreak
Contact your local Health Protection Team (HPT)
and take the infection control measures outlined below

The Health Protection Team (HPT) will work with:
• care home staff and GPs to investigate the outbreak
• infection prevention and control nurses to advise on infection control measures and investigations
• GPs to provide treatment and vaccination as required

Infection Prevention and Control Measures
All residents and staff should be offered seasonal flu vaccine each year

Hand hygiene and PPE
• Ensure that liquid soap and disposable paper towels are available at all sinks
• Wash hands thoroughly using liquid soap and water before and after contact with residents
• Provide alcohol-based hand rub for visitor use and supplementary use by staff
• Staff should wear single-use, disposable plastic aprons and gloves when dealing with affected residents. The HPT will advise on the use of surgical masks

Cleaning and waste disposal
• Provide tissues and covered sputum pots for affected residents. Dispose of these as healthcare waste
• Provide tissues and foot-operated bins for the disposal of used tissues in public areas
• De-clutter the environment and remove exposed foodstuffs
• Clean and disinfect all frequently touched surfaces (e.g. lockers, door handles, chairs) at least twice daily
• Always clean and disinfect communal care equipment (e.g. commodes, lifting equipment, baths) thoroughly between residents

Other measures
• Seek advice from your local HPT on closing the care home to new admissions, and restrictions on resident movement and transfers
• Place signage on entry to the care home informing of control measures
• If hospital admission is required, inform admission ward in advance that the resident is coming from a care home with a suspected/confirmed outbreak of influenza
• Ensure all staff (including cleaning staff) are aware of the outbreak, their responsibilities, and what they should do if they develop symptoms
• Inform residents/relatives of the situation, precautions/restrictions and risks (document in care records)
• Discourage visitors and non-essential support staff, particularly those at greatest risk (e.g. elderly, very young, pregnant women)
• Ask residents who have symptoms to stay in their room, with the door kept closed (subject to safety risk assessment). Discourage residents with symptoms from using common areas
• Provide resident-dedicated care equipment if possible (e.g. commodes, washbowls, lifting equipment). If this cannot be achieved, ensure all communal care equipment is cleaned and disinfected thoroughly between residents
• If possible, allocate separate staff teams to care for affected residents/unaffected residents

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