

# Information for Patients During an Outbreak

## General Outbreak Management

### What is a communicable disease?

A sickness caused by germs that are spread from one person to another.

### How are germs spread?

An infected person can spread the illness to others. They can do this by coughing, sneezing, or not performing proper and frequent hand hygiene properly after blowing their nose, or using the washroom.

### Who can get sick?

Anyone can become sick with a communicable disease. People at higher risk of getting sick include:

- children
- elderly
- people with weak immune systems
- people with chronic illness e.g. lung or heart disease

Individuals who live in communal living settings may be at higher risk of getting sick because they live in close quarters with a large number of people, which can increase the number of germs they are exposed to.

### What is a communicable disease outbreak?

An outbreak occurs when there is an increase in the number of people sick. During an outbreak, public health staff will work with site staff to stop the spread of germs by:

- limiting activities and visitors
- using protective clothing (gowns, gloves, masks, eye protection)
- taking samples e.g. stool or nose swabs to identify the germs causing the outbreak
- any other infection control steps as outlined in provincial guidelines

### What can patients do to protect themselves and other patients?

Good personal hygiene is the best protection. Clean your hands often:

- before eating
- after using the bathroom
- after blowing/wiping your nose
- after playing with pets

To wash your hands properly:

- a) use lots of warm, running water
- b) wet hands and apply soap
- c) vigorously rub soap over all surfaces of hands for 20 to 30 seconds
- d) pay special attention to fingernails and space between fingers and thumbs
- e) rinse well under warm water
- f) pat hands dry with a paper towel, avoid rubbing or over-drying
- g) use paper towel to shut off water tap
- h) use lotion to moisturize if hands are dry

Hand sanitizers that contain alcohol are a convenient and effective way to do hand hygiene. These are not to be used if your hands are visibly soiled. To use this product properly you should:

- a) cover all surfaces of your hands with the hand sanitizer
- b) rub all sides of the hands and between fingers
- c) pay special attention to around fingernails
- d) rub hands for 20 to 30 seconds until all the sanitizer has dried

If you are sick with colds, flu, diarrhea, vomiting, or skin infections, let a staff member know. Follow all directions given to you by staff.

### What about visitors?

- Family and other visitors can spread germs to patients they visit.
- Visitors are to visit one resident only.
- Visitors who are currently sick, will not be allowed to visit.
- If you are sick, your visitors will need to wear gloves, gowns, and possibly masks when visiting.
- If the illness continues to spread, visitors may not be allowed.

### What will happen if I am sick?

- You will be asked to stay in your room for a specified time.
- Meals will be brought to your room.
- Before coming out of your room, you will be given a bath or shower, your clothes and bedding will be washed, and your room will be thoroughly cleaned.

### Why do I have to stay in my room when I'm feeling better?

Even though you are feeling better, you can still spread germs. Staying in your room until staff tell you that you can come out, will help other patients and staff from getting sick.

### Why can't we have group activities?

Gathering patients together can help spread germs. Cancelling group activities can help stop the spread of germs.

### Can I leave the facility during an outbreak?

Yes, as long as you have not been asked to stay in your room. You should not visit a hospital, child care facility or a senior's home while your facility has an outbreak.

### I have been asked about a backup plan. What is this?

A backup plan is an alternative approach for your care. It is recommended you speak with both your case manager and family or other supports to determine how they can assist in providing care if a backup plan is required.

A backup plan should consider the following:

- Who can help care for me if I am sick, or my home care provider is sick?
- How long can they provide care to me? Consider a period lasting from one week to several months.
- Can the frequency of care visits be reduced?