

Frequently Asked Questions about...

Working with Your Health Department

Q. How do I contact my local health department?

A. Contact information for all of Virginia's health districts and city or county health departments, including phone numbers, addresses, and other important information, can be found online at:

www.vdh.virginia.gov/lhd. For more information, call the health department for the city or county in which your facility is located and ask to speak to a staff member in communicable disease control.

Q. When should I call my local health department?

A. Your local health department is ready to answer your questions about public health and disease prevention. Call to speak with a professional at the health department when you have a communicable disease situation that concerns you. Whether you are experiencing an increase in illness, have questions about a resident transferring in or out of your facility, or need more information about a disease-related topic, your local health department is available to help.

The list of reportable disease conditions can be found in your infection prevention toolkit and online at:

http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/epidemiology/documents/pdf/reportable_disease_list.pdf

Directors of labs, hospitals, nursing homes, and all physicians must notify the local health department whenever they suspect or confirm a resident/patient has any of the reportable diseases or an outbreak is occurring.

Assisted living facilities are required to call the local health department whenever they suspect an outbreak may be occurring but are not required to report individual cases of the reportable diseases.

Diseases in red on the reportable disease list require immediate notification to the local health department by the most rapid means possible. The preferred method is a direct phone call to communicable disease staff at the local health department. Notification of diseases in black type may be made by computer-generated printout, Epi-1 form, CDC surveillance form, or upon agreement with VDH, by means of secure electronic transmission.

Q. How do I know an outbreak is occurring?

A. An outbreak is simply more than the expected level of disease activity. If you notice there are people sick with similar symptoms and you feel there are more people with these symptoms than you usually see, call your local health department.

Q. How can my health department help me?

A. Your local health department can explain how to report cases of disease, provide additional copies of the Epi-1 form, give advice about ways to prevent disease, and assist with any other disease-related questions or concerns. If necessary, your local health department can draw upon other resources from Virginia's public health network, including regional epidemiologists, and staff from the central office in Richmond.

In an outbreak situation, your facility and your local health department will work together to identify the source of the problem and control the spread of disease. Health department staff will collect and assess information about each ill person, such as the date illness began, symptoms experienced, and exposure history. Health department staff may also interview both ill and healthy people at the facility, to identify factors associated with illness. Specimens may be collected for laboratory testing. Most importantly, the health department will recommend steps to follow to stop the outbreak and reduce the risk of disease.

A strong link between you and your local health department is the best way to ensure the highest health status possible for your residents and your community.