

# Infection Prevention Quick Guide: Responding to Increases in Illness and Outbreaks

When an increase in illness is identified in residents or staff, it is important to take rapid action to prevent spread to others in the facility. Some basic infection prevention strategies are universal for all suspected or confirmed outbreaks, and others are specific to the organism causing the infections.

## Infection Prevention Checklist



1. **Know your baseline rates of resident and staff illness so you can detect when an increase is occurring.**
  - a. See the “Surveillance” section of the VDH long-term care settings page for more resources on how to conduct surveillance, including sample infection tracking logs:  
<https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/haiar/ip/infection-prevention-resources-by-setting/long-term-care-settings/>.
2. **Monitor residents and staff for signs/symptoms of illness.**
  - a. Test promptly if symptoms are identified.
    - For asymptomatic residents or staff who are known to be exposed, follow disease-specific testing guidance as appropriate.
  - b. Provide treatment and prophylaxis when clinically indicated.
  - c. Ensure staff stay home when sick.
3. **Use appropriate Transmission-Based Precautions** in addition to Standard Precautions to care for residents with suspected/confirmed illness.
4. **Place residents appropriately.** See the “Resident Placement” quick guide for more information:  
[https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/content/uploads/sites/174/2023/10/Quick-Guide\\_Resident-Placement.pdf](https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/content/uploads/sites/174/2023/10/Quick-Guide_Resident-Placement.pdf)
  - a. Focus on good hand hygiene
  - b. Wear appropriate personal protective equipment based on the suspected/confirmed organism
5. **Gather information about ill individuals, such as:**
  - a. Signs/symptoms of illness
  - b. Illness onset dates
  - c. Similar characteristics among sick persons such as place (e.g., unit, room, and/or floor), age, gender, invasive devices, medical procedures (e.g., wound care)
  - d. Is there a suspected exposure that may have caused illness (e.g., group activity, shared meal)?

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6. **Increase frequency of cleaning and disinfection:** Focus on high-touch surfaces, common spaces, community rooms, shower rooms, or other spaces where multiple residents, visitors, or staff may congregate. See the “Cleaning and Disinfection During Outbreaks” quick guide for more information: [https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/content/uploads/sites/174/2023/09/Quick-Guide\\_Cleaning\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/content/uploads/sites/174/2023/09/Quick-Guide_Cleaning_FINAL.pdf)
7. **Communicate:**
  - a. Notify your local health department when you suspect or confirm that an outbreak is occurring (<https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/health-department-locator/>). They will discuss how to prevent the spread of illness within the facility.
  - b. Notify staff, residents, and visitors about the situation.
    - Screen visitors for illness.
    - Discourage ill visitors from entering the facility.
    - Post signage sharing infection prevention measures that should be followed.
  - c. When transferring a resident to another facility, notify the receiving facility that an outbreak is occurring.
8. **Conduct infection prevention audits:** Make direct observations of hand hygiene, personal protective equipment use, compliance with Transmission-Based Precautions (if appropriate for the suspected/confirmed organism) and environmental cleaning and disinfection. Provide direct feedback to staff and just-in-time education as needed to improve practices. Share summary feedback from audits with staff and facility leadership.
9. **If relevant for the suspected/confirmed organism:**
  - a. Offer and reinforce the importance of vaccination.
  - b. Implement universal masking for source control on affected units or facility-wide, including for residents around others and healthcare personnel.
10. **Additional measures to consider if initial interventions fail to halt transmission:**
  - a. Establishing cohort units for residents with confirmed infections.
  - b. Limiting the use of communal areas where residents or healthcare personnel might congregate over multiple units or facility wide (e.g., group activities, communal dining).

## Additional Resources

VDH Long-Term Care Settings page: <https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/haiar/ip/infection-prevention-resources-by-setting/long-term-care-settings/>



- Outbreak reporting requirements
- Resources related to surveillance, disease-specific topics