Care Homes: Outbreak testing for residents and staff (England)

Definition of an outbreak: 2 or more clinically suspected or confirmed positives (LFT or PCR) among residents or staff detected in the same 14 day period. Two or more cases therefore usually requires outbreak testing, HPT to advise. One positive test result may be the first sign of an outbreak, so you should also contact your health protection team for advice in this instance.

Outbreak testing not required, but testing still advised by HPT

Outbreak testing required

Report situation to HPT for risk assessment and ask: is outbreak testing required?

If you suspect that there is a possible outbreak in your home, do not hesitate to contact the HPT and initiate whole home testing.

When the HPT advises whether outbreak testing is required, where it is unclear whether this is an outbreak, the HPT should err on the side of caution and recommend outbreak testing.

Need more test kits?
Contact 119 and ask for an urgent delivery if you are running out of the kits to do the necessary testing. You should receive these kits within 48 hours.

Outbreak testing

In addition to the regular testing cycle, in an outbreak situation, do the following:

For each resident

Day 1 4 7

For each staff member

Day 1 4 7

Unit 5 days of no positives

Complete 7 day rapid response daily staff testing using rapid lateral flow testing (unless HPT advises otherwise)

Outbreak testing not required, but testing still advised by HPT

If no further positives found within 7 days or confirmatory PCR (for the initial positive LFT) is negative

Further positives found

PCR test any newly symptomatic people.
Continue to isolate and ensure contract tracing has been completed.

Once outbreak PCR and resident LFT testing is complete, continue with the regular testing cycle. Rapid response daily staff testing may continue in this scenario until no new cases have been identified for 5 days.

If you have any questions or need more information, please contact your local Health Protection Team (HPT) for advice.

Stop daily LFT and return to the regular staff testing regime of weekly PCR testing and twice weekly LFT testing.

Determining the end of outbreak testing:
All staff and residents should be tested with PCR 14 days after the last resident or staff had a positive test result or showed coronavirus-like symptoms.

The local HPT will contact the care home if, following genomic sequencing of test results, they have identified a Variant of Concern (other than the Alpha (the “Kent” variant) and the Delta variant (the variant first identified in India) at which point they will discuss whether additional measures need to be put in place to enable additional protection. This might include an extension to the period of an outbreak up to 28 days from the last positive test.

If there are no positive PCR results from this “end of outbreak testing”, the Health Protection Team will declare the outbreak over.

The regular resident testing cycle of 28 days can be delayed to coincide with this “end of outbreak testing” if the two test dates fall within a week of each other.

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