



LONG-TERM CARE DIVISION POLICY MANUAL

Manual 9 - Infection Control	Policy: 9-6-1
Management of a Gastroenteritis Outbreak	
Effective Date: October 28, 2016	
Reviewed Date: September 23, 2025	

POLICY

The Home shall mitigate the risk of exposure and transmission of gastroenteritis infection within the Home.

DEFINITION

An outbreak is determined based on information provided by the Infection Prevention and Control (IPAC) Lead/designate, in consultation with Lambton Public Health and the Medical Director.

Definition: An "excess" number of cases over the expected (2 or more), that appear to be epidemiologically linked within a determined geographical area and exhibiting the same signs and symptoms.

Criteria for Potential Outbreak

To be defined as a case within a gastroenteritis outbreak, **at least one** of the following must be met:

- Two or more episodes of diarrhea (i.e., loose/watery bowel movements) within a 24-hour period; **OR**
- **Two or more** episodes of vomiting within a 24-hour period; **OR**
- **One or more** episodes of diarrhea (i.e., loose/watery bowel movements) and one or more episodes of vomiting within a 24-hour period;

PROCEDURE

When the presenting symptoms are determined, place the symptomatic Elders (vomiting and/or diarrhea) **ON CONTACT PRECAUTIONS**. (Refer to Policy #9-7-1 Additional Precautions)

Initiate outbreak control measures including:

- Promotion of hand hygiene with staff, Elders and visitors. Staff should not use the Elder washrooms to wash their hands.
- Restriction of ill Elders while communicable to their rooms (48 hours after last episode). Ill staff should also be excluded based on the same communicability.
- Posting signage at appropriate locations to communicate the presence of an outbreak and any instructions or information.
- Review of precautions with all staff, physicians, Elders, families and visitors.
- Ensuring availability and appropriate use of personal protective equipment (PPE) consisting of masks, gloves and gowns.
- Increasing cleaning and disinfection of affected Elder rooms, multi-use equipment, high touch surfaces and areas. Dedicating equipment to symptomatic Elders is recommended.
- If possible, cohort nursing staff and Elders. Ideally, direct care providers (e.g. RN, RPN, PSW) should not provide care to both symptomatic and asymptomatic Elders during the same shift when possible.
- The use of disposable dishes is not necessary or recommended.

Enhanced Environmental Cleaning/Sanitizing

- Ensure cleaning and sanitizing of environmental surfaces frequently contaminated by Elders/staff (i.e. hand rails, door knobs, bathroom units, furniture)
- Ensure a process for proper disposal of contaminated materials
- Disposable dishes and cutlery are not required
- Refer to: **PIDAC Best Practices for Environmental Cleaning for Prevention and Control of Infections and Best Practices for Cleaning, Disinfection and Sterilization of Medical Equipment/Devices**

Exclusion of Symptomatic Staff from Work/Home

- Staff, volunteers and students who meet case definition are excluded from the Home until they have been 48 hours symptom free.

Limited Visiting

- Signs should be posted in the Home indicating that there is an outbreak and visitors should be warned that they may be at risk of acquiring infection within the Home.
- During an outbreak, visitors should visit only their own friend/relative, in their own room (not in a common area), and should be encouraged to wash their hands before and after the visit at hand hygiene stations in the Home.
- Lambton Public Health does not recommend closing the Home to visitors/volunteers. Only in the case of extremely virulent disease would the Medical Officer of Health order the Home to be closed to the public.

Suspension of Social Activities

- As much as possible, restrict activities to their respective neighbourhoods. The Outbreak Management Team must find a balance between restricting activities and to control the spread of infection and providing therapeutic opportunities from social activities.
- Physiotherapy (PT)/designate will follow the direction of the IPAC Lead or designate.

Restrict New Move-Ins, Return to Home and All Other Transfers

- Transfer restrictions will be based on the guidance of Lambton Public Health.
- Receiving hospital will be notified if Elder is transferred from the outbreak Home area.
- **Elders admitted from the outbreak Home area to hospital with enteric illness** can come back to the Home at any time, provided that appropriate care can be given.

Working at Other Homes

During enteric outbreaks, staff and volunteers will follow the direction of Lambton Public Health with regards to working in other Homes.

Declaring The Outbreak Over

The outbreak is declared over by Lambton Public Health.

Complete the Outbreak Investigation File

Completion of the Final Report of a Gastrointestinal Outbreak is to be done jointly by the Home and Lambton Public Health. Copies of all documents related to the outbreak will be kept on file with the IPAC Lead at the Home.

Review the Outbreak

A meeting will be held with the Outbreak Management Team to review the course and management of the outbreak. The purpose of this meeting is to review what was handled well and what could be improved for future outbreaks. Provide the report to the IPAC Lead/designate.

References:

Appendix 1: Case Definitions and Disease Specific Information – Disease: Gastroenteritis Outbreaks in Institutions and Public Hospitals, May 2022.