

Preparing your care home for winter 2020



The Regulation and
Quality Improvement
Authority



Public Health
Agency





Introduction

Every year we recognise that there are pressures on our health and social care services that increase over the winter months. This year, the impact of bad weather and seasonal flu-like illness will be made worse by the continued circulation of COVID-19 in our communities. We must all follow the government guidance to reduce the spread of COVID-19 to protect ourselves, our families and the communities of people we care for.

Effective forward planning can benefit your residents and help to reduce the pressures across the health and social care system.

This guide aims to act as an aide-mémoire to support care homes in their preparations to manage through the winter season. It highlights the importance of an up-to-date business continuity plan to deal with a range of challenges, including the impact of adverse weather and illnesses such as seasonal flu and COVID-19 on your service.

Further resources are available online at www.rqia.org.uk and www.publichealth.hscni.net

Be prepared!

Business continuity

A business continuity or emergency plan for your service should be developed, kept up-to-date and tested regularly. This should detail how you will respond in a crisis, for example extreme temperatures or storms, which may affect the day-to-day operation of your service.

Ensure you have arrangements in place to support the safe running of your service when staff are unable to attend work, whether through illness, a requirement to self-isolate or extreme weather events affecting transport. With specific reference to COVID-19, please ensure that all staff are aware of the latest government guidance on symptom management, testing and travel.

Planned maintenance programme

As part of your planned maintenance programme, in advance of the winter period, please ensure that your heating systems, power supply, catering, medical equipment and ICT services have been checked or serviced.



COVID-19

Winter 2020 will be additionally impacted by the circulation of COVID-19. A wide range of resources and guidance is available from the Department of Health, Public Health Agency, RQIA and NI Direct. It is important that you and your staff are aware of this guidance and keep up to date. This information will also support and inform your risk assessment process.



Infection prevention and control and PPE

Compliance with standard infection prevention and control precautions are key to reducing the transmission of infection. Make contact with your local HSC Trust to discuss your supply of PPE to ensure you have a regular stock over the winter months.



All staff should be reminded of their own responsibilities, including the importance of hand hygiene and respiratory hygiene. Ensure your staff are up to date with the latest guidance. Training is available free of charge from the Clinical Education Centre at: <https://cec.hscni.net> Your residents should be supported to wash their hands or use hand wipes after using toilet facilities, before eating food and after coughing or sneezing. Visitors must be made aware of hand hygiene, the requirement to wear a face covering and to maintain social distance.

Anticipatory/Advance care planning

Regular discussion with your residents on the care they wish to receive is helpful in identifying their concerns and wishes; their values or personal goals for care; and their understanding about their illness and prognosis. Work with GPs to establish residents' preferences for the types of care or treatment that may be beneficial in the future, particularly when they become unable to speak for themselves. The individual may wish to include their family and friends in this discussion. It is recommended that with the resident's agreement this discussion is documented, regularly reviewed, and communicated to those involved in their care.

Staff health and wellbeing

The risk of seasonal illnesses, such as flu, to both residents and staff can be reduced through a planned vaccination programme. This may reduce the potential for hospital admission, staff absences, and the associated costs of agency cover. Flu vaccination is available free of charge for every member of staff and you can access the flu vaccine at a local community pharmacy. Occupational health advice is available from your local HSC Trust and resources are also available to promote staff health and wellbeing (for more information see www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications/useful-guide-mental-and-emotional-wellbeing-resources).





Visiting

Maintaining communication between residents, families and carers is important and you should have a range of methods to facilitate this. Department of Health guidance *Regional Principles for Visiting in Care Settings* (available at www.health-ni.gov.uk/Covid-19-visiting-guidance) should be referred to when planning for anyone visiting your home.

Communication

Guidance is available to support communication with your residents when wearing a face mask. The booklet *Communicating with your client during COVID-19* is available at www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications/communicating-your-client-during-covid-19

ECHO sessions

A series of awareness sessions on the following topics will be delivered over the coming weeks (details on a separate flyer which will be distributed by email):

- Emergency planning and business continuity
- Medicines management and emergency boxes
- Communication and risk assessment
- Learning from an outbreak (IPC, testing)
- Palliative and end of life care

If you are not already registered with ECHO, visit www.hospiceuk.org and search for Project ECHO.



Useful websites:

Public Health Agency:
www.publichealth.hscni.net

Department of Health:
www.health-ni.gov.uk

Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority:
www.rqia.org.uk

Clinical Education Centre:
cec.hscni.net

NI Direct:
www.nidirect.gov.uk/campaigns/coronavirus-covid-19

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