care inspectorate

Meaningful Connection fact sheet

Supporting meaningful connection during an outbreak situation

This factsheet has been designed to accompany this webinar, which you can view here.

Meaningful connection is important for everyone. Experiencing connections with others that are valued and meaningful has profound impacts on physical, mental and emotional health and wellbeing. It is essential to our identity and personhood and is a fundamental part of our human rights. Research confirms that when people do not experience meaningful connection, the negative consequences for their physical, mental and emotional health and wellbeing are far-reaching.

Outbreaks of infectious disease in care homes can generate dilemmas around balancing reducing the risk of infection and potential harm with upholding the right to private and family life. The two new Health and Social Care Standards support services by setting out the clear expectation that everyone who lives in a care home will always have the right to see and get support from the people who are important to them, even in an outbreak situation when restrictions are needed on advice from Public Health. Any restrictions must be for the shortest possible period.

Named visiting is the default position during care home outbreaks. It enables people experiencing care to choose family members or friends who can visit and spend time with them – current guidance specifies up to three named people, of whom one can visit per day.

Essential visiting is a more restricted form of visiting and should always be supported, regardless of outbreak status, when needed to alleviate distress or upset for the person experiencing care or relative, or in end-of-life situations.

To reduce infection risks and contain any spread, it is important for all staff to be familiar with their roles and responsibilities about infection prevention and control, ensuring standard infection control precautions are embedded into daily practice and that the most up to date guidance is known and followed.

Services can prepare and **be outbreak ready** by considering the following questions to help inform decision-making.

Meaningful Connection

- Have you a communication plan in place in the event of an outbreak, to ensure everyone has access to early, clear, regularly updated information which supports their needs and preferences, and highlights how they can ask questions?
- How will people's individual needs be best supported during any periods of isolation, including people with dementia/cognitive impairment?
- How will PPE (particularly face masks) impact on communication, and how can this be minimised?
- Does the personal planning reflect people's individual needs in the event of an outbreak (for instance around communication, isolation, stress and distress, use of communication technology)?
- Does it include details of named people and how they prefer to be contacted?
- How can staff best be deployed during an outbreak to support people's physical, mental and emotional wellbeing?
- Do all staff know and follow the appropriate transmission-based precautions in the event of an outbreak, to minimise spread and ensure restrictions are in place for the shortest possible time?
- Focus on taking any necessary measures to reduce risk while considering the individual impact on people experiencing care.

More resources on meaningful connection are available here.