

Reducing workforce movement between care homes

Guidance for agency workers and visiting professionals

Based on the latest evidence of significant asymptomatic transmission in care homes, providers should take all possible steps to minimise staff movement between care homes, to stop infection spreading between locations. Subject to maintaining safe staffing levels, providers should employ staff to work at a single location on a particular day. If this is not possible then staff such as agency staff should change their uniform and shower between facilities; however this should only happen to maintain safe staffing levels when there is no alternative. Providers should also support the staff they employ to follow all relevant advice to minimise their risk of contracting COVID-19 outside of work.

Minimising workforce transmission

Given the evidence of the prevalence of asymptomatic transmission, PHA strongly recommends that care homes do all they can to restrict staff movement wherever feasible. The checklist below sets out the actions that should be considered by providers. Not all of these actions will be possible or appropriate for every provider, but when taken in combination will help reduce the risk of outbreaks in homes and slow the spread of the virus.

- Ensure that members of staff work in only one care home wherever possible. This includes staff who work for one employer across several homes, or members of staff that work on a part-time basis for multiple employers. Agency and bank staff should be 'block booked' where possible.
- These restrictions should be extended to agency staff, under the general principle that the fewer settings members of staff work in, the better.
- While the safety of residents and staff is paramount, providers should, where possible, cohort staff to individual groups of patients or floors/wings, including segregation of COVID-positive and COVID-negative patients. Advice on this can be provided by the Health Protection Team (PHA) who will be in regular contact with care homes throughout the course of the outbreak. For advice and support, phone the Health Protection Duty Room on 0300 555 0119 (Mon–Fri, 9am–5pm). Out of hours, contact the first on call Public Health Doctor through ambulance control on 028 9040 4045.
- Where additional staff are needed to restrict movement between or within care homes, contact the Trust home care team for advice and support.
- Take steps to limit use of public transport by members of staff. Where they do not have their own private vehicle, this could include encouraging walking or cycling to and from work and supporting this with changing facilities or rooms. In some instances, local taxi firms may be willing to provide fares to and from a care home at discounted rates.
- Consider how you could provide accommodation for staff who proactively choose to stay separately from their families in order to limit social interaction outside work. This may be provision on site, or in partnership with local hotels. Further guidance on employing the 'Safe at Home' model to minimise the transmission of infection in care homes was issued by the Health Minister on 18 May, and can be accessed at: <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/health/covid-19-safe-at-home.pdf>