

Strengthening winter resilience in Care Homes:

A system-wide public health approach in Leeds



Background

Adult social care faces rising and complex pressures, intensified each winter by increased respiratory illness, workforce shortages and hospital discharge demands. To address this, partners across Leeds have developed a proactive, system-wide approach to strengthen winter resilience in care homes. Through collaborative planning and preparedness, this initiative helps care settings anticipate risks, respond effectively to seasonal pressures and maintain safe, high-quality care during the most challenging months.

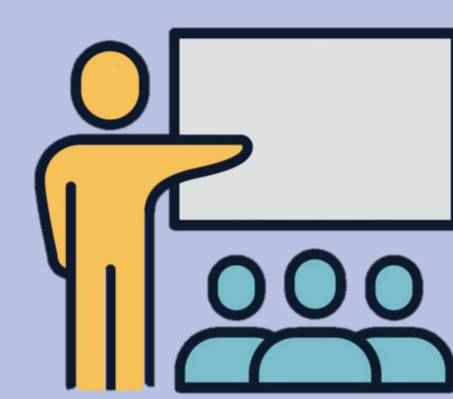
Approach

Working within a politically complex and resource-constrained environment, this initiative demonstrates leadership, collaborative decision-making and effective partnership across organisational boundaries. Partners across the local authority, hospital trusts, national government agencies and private care home providers have aligned priorities to create clear pathways, consistent support, and coordinated outbreak response.



1. Partnership and collaborative working

- At the heart of this work is strong, trusted partnership working between Leeds City Council services (Public Health and Care Home Commissioning), Private care home providers, NHS Trust services, ICB partners and the UK Health Security Agency.
- By working collaboratively, partners have aligned priorities and clear and consistent pathways of support for care homes.
- This collaboration has enabled a coordinated response to winter pressures, ensuring care settings are supported during outbreaks and better prepared in advance.



2. Workforce development and training

- Another key element is workforce development, ensuring care home staff can manage infection risks safely.
- Training is delivered collaboratively and includes specialist IPC training, Health Protection sessions on vaccination and adverse weather, and winter preparedness workshops, as well as additional targeted training from UKHSA equipping staff to respond to outbreaks.
- This comprehensive offer builds confidence, promotes consistency and strengthens resilience across the care home workforce.



3. Strong IPC guidance & outbreak support

- A key strength is specialist Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) support delivered through a cooperative agreement between Leeds Community Healthcare and Leeds City Council.
- A dedicated community IPC service provides tailored support to care homes, including seven-day outbreak cover with daily expert advice on testing, treatment and precautions, alongside on-site staff flu vaccination and bi-annual IPC audits.
- This comprehensive approach strengthens prevention, enables rapid response and maintains high IPC standards.



4. Clear and consistent communication

- Effective communication is critical during periods of system pressure. Partners provide clear, consistent guidance, ensuring care homes receive timely information and know how to access advice and escalation.
- Key messages cover infection prevention, outbreak reporting, circulating infections, vaccination, and cold weather preparedness.
- Clear antiviral prescribing pathways, supported by proactive primary care engagement and a ringfenced pharmacy stock, enable rapid access during outbreaks.
- This coordinated approach reduces delays, supports timely responses, improves compliance, and ensures care homes feel informed and supported.



5. Reviewing risk and continuous improvement

- This initiative is driven by a culture of reflection, learning and continuous improvement.
- Multi-agency forums such as infectious disease reviews, care home system groups and Adult Social Care resilience meetings help assess pressures, identify risks and coordinate responses.
- Respiratory outbreak reviews are central, using data on outbreak rates, antiviral use, vaccination uptake, pathway adherence, and audits to identify issues and target support.
- System-wide pathways, including discharge and outbreak management, are regularly reviewed and updated to maintain alignment, strengthen preparedness and improve winter response.

Impact and outcomes

- ✓ Through proactive planning, strong partnership working, and a clear focus on prevention and preparedness, this approach has strengthened the ability of Leeds care homes to respond to winter pressures. It has helped to protect residents, support staff, improve consistency of care, and enhance system resilience during the challenging winter months.
- ✓ This work demonstrates how collaborative partnerships, prevention focused approaches and meaningful engagement with care providers can help to ensure resilience in care settings and maintain a stable outbreak position despite being a large city with over 150 care homes.