

Ministerial briefing: Fighting COVID-19: Preventing and limiting nosocomial transmission of COVID-19

- The fight against COVID-19 and the recovery of health and social care services in Wales has been, and will be, heavily dependent upon the prevention of nosocomial infection.
- Although 'nosocomial' traditionally refers to hospital acquired disease, the pandemic has required action in all closed settings, including care homes, community hospitals, independent hospitals and residential centres for clinically vulnerable individuals such as people with learning disabilities.
- COVID-19 is highly transmissible and nosocomial transmission has been evident and caused outbreaks in most Welsh hospitals and care homes.
- Mortality is higher for patients with COVID-19 acquired nosocomially compared with that acquired in the community.
- Public Health Wales (PHW) data for 1 March 2020 – 30 May 2021 indicates 7127 probable and definite nosocomial COVID-19 infections in Welsh hospitals.
- The national priority of preventing and limiting the spread of COVID-19 was identified at an early stage in the pandemic and consequently the Nosocomial Transmission Group (NTG), jointly chaired by the Deputy Chief Medical Officer and the Chief Nursing Officer, was established in May 2020.
- The NTG membership is drawn from Welsh Government, PHW and colleagues from health, care and professional organisations.
- The NTG has developed and issued an extensive range of guidance on implementing infection prevention and control (IPC) guidelines, personal protective equipment (PPE), COVID-19 testing, cleaning standards, bed spacing, ventilation and environmental controls.
- The group acts as a forum for review of core COVID-19 data streams concerning hospitals and care homes and supports planning of the national response to the pandemic.
- As one of the NTG workstreams, a set of national standards for IPC training has been developed. This is not limited to the prevention of COVID-19 infection but is intended as the basis of a comprehensive all Wales IPC training curriculum going forward.
- As the rate of COVID-19 transmission continues to fall, the group has a focus on coordinating support and guidance for the safe return of services including elective surgery and planned procedures.
- In collaboration with NHS colleagues, the Nosocomial Policy team developed an innovative reporting system to capture data on hospital outbreaks of COVID-19 across Wales.
- Nosocomial infection can occur as single cases or in clusters of two or more positive cases called outbreaks.

- The system provides a timely assessment of COVID-19 outbreaks within all health boards and Velindre NHS Trust and assurance to Welsh Government that appropriate measures are being taken to mitigate transmission to patients and staff.
- Health board self-reported data to the Welsh Government outbreak reporting system indicated that from 23 November – 23 June 2021, during the 'second wave', there were 232 outbreaks in Welsh hospitals in which 3387 patients and 1360 members of staff tested positive for COVID-19.
- All nosocomial Covid-19 infections are "incidents of patient safety" and therefore health bodies are obliged to investigate these under Putting Things Right (PTR).
- The National Framework (Management of Patient Safety Incidents following Nosocomial Transmission of Covid-19) has been developed that requires health bodies to contact patients or their families where harm has been caused. Potential claim values vary widely. Initial estimates range from £7.7m to £69m.
- Nosocomial transmission of COVID-19 and associated avoidable harm and death in hospitals and care homes is likely to be a major focus of a future inquiry.