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Public Health
England

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Classification of an outbreak

An outbreak is defined as 2 or more linked cases with similar symptoms (or a notifiable disease) than would normally be expected, such as:

- 2 or more cases of diarrhoea or vomiting or both
- scabies
- scarlet fever
- impetigo

When to report

Head teachers and managers should contact their local health protection team as soon as they suspect an outbreak to discuss the situation and agree if any actions are needed. It is useful to have the information listed below available before this discussion as it will help to inform the size and nature of the outbreak:

- total numbers affected (staff and children)
- symptoms
- date(s) when symptoms started
- number of classes affected

If you suspect cases of infectious illness at your school but are unsure if it is an outbreak, please [call your local HPT](#).

How to report

Childcare settings are asked to telephone their local HPT as soon as possible to report any serious or unusual illness particularly for:

- Escherichia coli (VTEC) (also called E.coli 0157) or E coli VTEC infection
- food poisoning
- hepatitis
- measles, mumps, rubella (rubella is also called German measles)
- meningitis
- tuberculosis
- typhoid
- whooping cough (also called pertussis)

The [full list of notifiable diseases](#) was updated in 2010.

Your local HPT can also draft letters and provide factsheets for parents and carers to ensure the most up to date information is given.

Confidentiality

It is important to note that health protection teams are bound to manage personal case details in strict confidence. Therefore, information given to schools from the team for distribution during an outbreak will never name cases or give out any personal details. Organisations where cases are identified are also bound to manage personal case details in strict confidence.

Read further information on [patient confidentiality and how information is used by the HPT](#).

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