



# Outbreak management plan stress testing outline



December 2024

<b>Theme</b>	Infection prevention and control
<b>Topic</b>	Outbreak management plan (OMP) stress testing
<b>Level</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Operational</li><li>• Management</li><li>• Governance</li></ul>
<b>Aim</b>	To provide aged care providers with experience in stress testing their outbreak management plans (OMP) through realistic scenarios to identify and fix possible gaps in their OMP. This helps to ensure older people and staff are safe and well during infectious outbreaks.
<b>Learning outcome</b>	Learners will be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• effectively evaluate and stress test their OMPs</li><li>• show that they understand key outbreak management strategies.</li></ul>
<b>Materials required</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Whiteboard and markers - for brainstorming, explaining scenarios and recording key discussion points</li><li>• Scenario handouts</li><li>• OMP</li></ul>
<b>Reading resources</b>	<a href="#">Lessons learned by aged care providers</a>

## What is a stress test?

A stress test evaluates the performance and flexibility of systems, protocols, and staff when responding to challenging situations. A stress test to evaluate your OMP reproduces the conditions of an infectious disease outbreak to assess how ready and effective your OMP is. This includes testing response processes, communication channels, and resource management under realistic pressure. Testing your OMP makes sure that, when there is a real outbreak, staff are well prepared to:

- protect the health and safety of older people
- provide continuity of care, following the principles of clinical governance.

[Clinical governance](#) is a set of:

- leadership behaviours
- policies
- procedures
- responsibilities
- relationships
- planning
- monitoring
- improvement processes.

These support safe, quality clinical care and good clinical outcomes for each older person. By doing stress tests, you can strengthen your clinical governance and support a culture of accountability, learning, and preparation to protect the health and safety of older people.

## Testing outline

### Option 1: Live OMP stress test (recommended option)

Here are some general steps to follow when doing a stress test for your OMP:

1. Form a team responsible for organising and overseeing the stress test. Tell this team about the stress test before starting it. Don't tell the rest of your staff if you plan to do a surprise test to reproduce a real outbreak response.
2. Identify your specific objectives for the stress test. Decide if you want to involve the whole service or just a section. Remember you need to make sure there is continuity of care for the older people you care for.
3. Develop a scenario that models a possible outbreak. Make sure the scenario is relevant to your service. We have included some scenarios below to get you started.
4. Announce the start of the test at a pre-planned time. If it's a surprise drill, start the test by introducing the infection as though it were a real outbreak.
5. Start your OMP. Staff should follow the OMP as they would in a real outbreak. Communicate with older people, families, visitors, and all relevant stakeholders that you're running a stress test.
6. Throughout the stress test, the overseeing team should monitor the testing closely, noting:
  - a. the response times
  - b. how staff are following the policies and procedures
  - c. any issues that come up.

This team also needs to make sure that staff provide continuity of care and assess how well you're able to keep providing care to all older people while managing the test outbreak. How the service performs can be analysed during the debrief.

## Option 2: Desktop OMP assessment

While a live stress test is the only way that will help you understand your service's readiness, it's not always possible to do. If you can't do a stress test at the service, and you still want to review or assess your OMP, you can use the scenarios provided and follow the process below to assess your OMP. This will also help you identify any areas where you could improve.

Here are some general steps to follow when doing a desktop OMP assessment:

1. Start by reading the scenarios in this document. Take note of key details.
2. Using your OMP, write down the steps you would take to manage the scenario. As you write your response, assess whether your OMP addresses all the challenges in the scenario.
3. Imagine following your written response in real time. Think about possible challenges, such as delays in receiving test results or staff burnout.
4. Evaluate the likely outcomes if this scenario were real. Would your OMP effectively contain the outbreak?
5. Based on your evaluation, identify any areas where you could strengthen your OMP. Share your findings and proposed improvements with your team. Work with your team to update your OMP, incorporating the improvements discussed. Make sure you share any changes with all staff and relevant stakeholders and train them on updated procedures.

## Scenarios:

You can test your OMP by thinking about a past outbreak your service had and recreating those conditions to check if your current OMP will help you to manage the situation. Or you can use one of the scenarios provided or come up with another which works in your service.

### Scenario 1:

An older person in your aged care service starts showing symptoms of a respiratory illness. Symptoms include a persistent cough, fever, and shortness of breath. Within 48 hours, 5 more older people on the same floor develop similar symptoms. Two staff members also call in sick with flu-like symptoms.

### Scenario 2:

Your aged care service has older people in 2 separate buildings. Some older people are in a memory support unit with keypad access. You have a combination of single and shared rooms with some sharing a bathroom and others with a private ensuite.

After a weekend with higher-than-normal visitor numbers, 2 older people in the memory support unit show symptoms of nausea and diarrhea. Overnight, it's reported 2 more older people who have a shared bathroom have similar symptoms. The local health department has issued a warning about a norovirus outbreak in the community.

### Scenario 3:

An agency staff member who worked several shifts at your service last week calls to tell you that she has flu-like respiratory symptoms. This staff member had been assigned to various units, interacting with lots of older people, staff and visitors during her time at the service. Your service now faces several challenges:

- the building is older
- there is limited ventilation
- there are only a few single rooms available for isolating affected older people.

Within 2 days of this phone call, several older people across the service start to have flu-like symptoms.

## Debrief or review

Debriefing after stress testing an OMP helps you to:

- analyse how effective your response was
- identify gaps
- gather valuable feedback from staff.

This process helps you to keep improving and helps you strengthen your OMP and better prepare for future outbreaks.

## Tips for debriefing after a stress test

### Stage 1: debrief and analysis

1. Straight after stress testing, gather all staff that took part for a debriefing session.
2. Discuss:
  - a. what went well
  - b. what challenges there were
  - c. where you can improve.

Encourage staff from all levels involved in the test to share their experiences and suggestions for improvement. Open the floor for questions and clarify things where necessary.

3. Review the notes the overseeing team took during the test. Identify any gaps in your OMP, such as issues with communication, resource allocation, or infection control.

### Stage 2: review and repetition

1. Based on the feedback and your analysis, update your OMP to address any weaknesses or gaps. Record opportunities where you can improve and make sure you link these to your continuous improvement plan (CIP) to track progress and measure outcomes over time.
2. Keep a detailed record of the test, including the scenario, who took part, the actions staff took, and the outcomes of the debriefing session.
3. Share the results and any updates to the OMP with all staff, the governing body, older people, their families, and other relevant stakeholders. This makes sure everyone knows about any changes and improvements. Encourage people to give you feedback to support a culture of collaboration and improvement.
4. Schedule regular stress tests to keep evaluating and improving your OMP. Each test should focus on an area you've found needs improvement. Make sure the OMP improves in line with best practice and is ready for possible outbreaks.

The success of stress testing is in the actions you take to keep improving and fix risk areas. By including these improvements in your CIP, you can improve your outbreak response, strengthen your organisation's flexibility and make sure older people are safe and well.

**Note:** You should change this lesson plan to meet the specific needs of the older people you provide care and services to and the unique situation of your aged care service.



*The Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission acknowledges the traditional owners of country throughout Australia, and their continuing connection to land, sea and community. We pay our respects to them and their cultures, and to elders both past and present.*

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