



UK Health
Security
Agency



UTI prevention and awareness in older adults 2025

Communications toolkit for stakeholders

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Introduction

This joint communications toolkit produced by the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) and NHS England can be used to target older adults (65 years +), who are at higher risk of the impacts of urinary tract infections as well as paid and unpaid carers to raise awareness of UTI prevention, symptom recognition and treatment, including advice on how and when to seek help. It contains key messages, background information, social media assets statistics and useful links.

The content should be used by those who provide primary and related health and social care services to older adults and those who care for them, for example:

- General practice
- Community pharmacy
- Commissioning organisations
- Residential and domiciliary care
- Charities and networks that support older adults

For further information about our national campaigns and communications please contact: externalaffairs@ukhsa.gov.uk

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Follow UKHSA on X [@UKHSA](#) and BlueSky [@ukhsa.bsky.social](#).

Background information

Urinary tract infections (UTIs) affect the urinary tract, including the bladder (cystitis), urethra (urethritis) or kidneys (kidney infection).

UTIs and catheter associated UTIs are one of the leading causes of E. coli and Gram-negative bloodstream infections and are a significant cause of death and serious illness leading to hospitalisation, especially amongst the older population.

UTIs may be treated with antibiotics, but they are not always needed.

What are the symptoms of a UTI?

A person with a UTI may have signs and symptoms including:

- Needing to pee more frequently, suddenly, or more urgently than usual. Pain or a burning sensation when peeing.
- Needing to pee at night more often than usual.
- New pain in the lower tummy.
- New incontinence or wetting themselves that is worse than usual.
- Kidney pain or pain in the lower back.
- Blood in the pee.
- General signs of infection, like a fever, a high temperature or feeling hot and shivery, with shaking (rigors) or chills.

- A very low temperature, below 36°C.
- A person may experience fewer of these symptoms if they have a urinary catheter.
- Urine infections can often cause systemic infection which may result in people collapsing /falling. Falls or changes in behaviour require a assessment by a healthcare professional
- Changes in behaviour, such as acting agitated or confused (delirium). These could be a symptom of a UTI but could also be due to other causes, which need to be ruled out by a healthcare professional.

How healthcare professionals diagnose a UTI in older adults

- To ensure an accurate diagnosis in older adults, a healthcare worker or care worker will avoid using urine dipsticks to check for a UTI, as they become more unreliable with increasing age. This is especially true for adults living in care homes and those with a urinary catheter.
- Older adults are at greater risk of having bacteria present in the bladder/urine without an infection. This is called a “asymptomatic bacteriuria” and is not harmful, and although it causes a positive urine dipstick, antibiotics are not beneficial and may cause harm.
- In those suspected of having a UTI, a specimen of urine is sent for laboratory testing to inform which antibiotics are needed for treatment.

Preventing UTIs

For paid and unpaid carers:

- Support those in your care to drink enough fluids. Regular drinks, like water, boost hydration. The [NHS Eatwell Guide](#) recommends that people should aim to drink 6 to 8 cups or glasses of fluid a day. Water, lower-fat milk and sugar-free drinks, including tea and coffee, all count.
- Sometimes people don't like to drink as they are worried about getting to the toilet. If someone you care for is less able to access the toilet, ensure they are provided with support to do so at regular intervals, so that they feel confident to keep well by drinking enough. If needed, a continence professional can support with a continence assessment.
- Help might include choosing the right type of drink that they like, at the right temperature, in the right kind of cup or glass.
- Support those you care for to keep the genital area clean and understand the importance of personal hygiene, showering daily where possible, especially if they suffer from incontinence. Check and change incontinence pads often. If they are soiled, they should be changed right away.
- Wipe from front to back when they go to the toilet.

- Avoid using irritating products such as scented soaps, gels, and sprays around the genital area.
- Avoid the use of urinary dipsticks to diagnose UTIs in older adults and those with urinary catheters as they are unreliable. In some cases, a specimen of urine is sent for laboratory testing to inform which antibiotics are needed for treatment.
- If someone you care for has frequent or recurring UTIs, discuss this with their healthcare professional. They may be able to recommend or prescribe treatments that will help prevent their UTIs. Further information for patients may also be [found on the NHS website](#).

For older adults:

- Drinking enough fluids. Regular drinks, like water or squash will boost hydration and help your body stay healthy. The [NHS Eatwell Guide](#) recommends that people should aim to drink 6 to 8 cups or glasses of fluid a day. Water, lower-fat milk and sugar-free drinks, including tea and coffee, all count.
- Regularly drinking may mean more trips to the toilet. If you are having difficulties getting to the toilet or worried about incontinence discuss this with your doctor or a nurse who will be able to help you. Don't reduce the amount you drink.
- Not holding onto your pee, unless otherwise instructed by a healthcare professional you should go to the toilet as soon as possible when you need to.
- Keeping up with personal hygiene. Wash, or shower daily where possible especially if you suffer from incontinence.
 - Keep the genital area clean and dry
 - Check and change incontinence pads often. If they are soiled, they should be changed right away.
 - Wipe from front to back when you go to the toilet.
 - Avoid using irritating products such as scented soaps, gels, and sprays around the genital area.
- Washing the skin around the genitals with water before and after sex.
- Going for a pee as soon as possible after sex
- If you have frequent or recurring UTIs, discuss this with your healthcare professional. They may be able to recommend or prescribe treatments that will help prevent future UTIs. Further information for patients may also be [found on the NHS website](#).

Preventing UTIs for those with indwelling catheters

If someone you care for has an indwelling urinary catheter, a thin hollow flexible tube inserted into the bladder to drain urine, we recommend the following advice:

- Wash your hands with soap and water every time before and after touching the catheter and any equipment attached to it.

- Ensure the catheter bag is attached to the patient leg below the level of the bladder to avoid urine travelling back into the bladder from the bag.
- If possible, make sure people with a catheter have a daily shower with their bag or valve attached.
- If it is not possible to have a shower, ensure you wash the skin in the area where the catheter enters the body with unscented soaps or gels and water at least daily.
- For men, it is important to wash under the foreskin, replacing afterwards, unless circumcised.
- After using the toilet, wipe front to back with toilet tissue, to avoid moving poo from the bottom to the catheter.
- Urinary catheter use comes with a risk of infection, in fact for every day the catheter stays in the risk of infection increases. Therefore, long term use should be avoided wherever possible. Discuss other options with a healthcare professional and ensure that people who use them are regularly reviewed by their doctor or a continence nurse.

Taking action if you think you or someone you care for has a UTI

For paid and unpaid carers:

Contact a healthcare professional, this could be the local GP, a senior nurse, the community pharmacist, walk-in centre or NHS 111 service if you think someone you care for may have a UTI. Be aware that you may need to seek urgent help from healthcare services if someone you care for becomes unwell either before or after a diagnosis of UTI as this may indicate a worsening infection affecting their whole body. See here for further information [Urinary tract infections \(UTIs\) - NHS](#)

For older adults:

What should you do if you think you have a UTI?

If you think you might have a UTI, ensure you are drinking enough fluids to avoid becoming dehydrated. Take paracetamol up to four times a day to reduce any pain.

Who to contact

Contact a healthcare professional if you think you might have a UTI, this could be your GP, a nurse, the community pharmacist, a walk-in centre or the NHS 111 service.

Treatment

There are different treatment options to discuss with your healthcare professional. Antibiotics should only be taken if prescribed by a healthcare professional. Always ensure antibiotics are taken as directed on the medicine label.

If you have frequent or recurring UTIs

It is very important that you talk to your healthcare professional as there are further treatments they can recommend or prescribe that may help prevent UTI frequency. This may include treatments like vaginal oestrogen.

Successfully managing UTIs and use of antibiotics



Successful management of UTIs requires a coordinated focus on prevention, early and accurate diagnosis, and appropriate treatment. If left unmanaged, UTIs can lead to severe infection, sepsis and in some cases death.

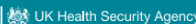

- Antibiotics can be lifesaving, but antibiotics are not always needed for UTI symptoms. It is important for people to only take antibiotics for a UTI if they are needed. This is because taking antibiotics can cause side effects, for example nausea and diarrhoea and can damage the 'friendly' bacteria that normally live in the intestinal tract and on the skin and protect us from infection.
- Taking antibiotics when they are not needed can also make the bacteria that cause infections to become resistant to that antibiotic, meaning that the antibiotic might not work if it is needed for a true infection in the future.
- Antibiotics should only be taken if a healthcare professional prescribes them for that infection. Antibiotics should always be taken as directed on the medicine label.
- A healthcare professional may prescribe a short course of antibiotics if a UTI is confirmed. Three-day courses of antibiotics are usually effective for women, but a longer course is needed for men or those with a urinary catheter.

Social media assets

We have a variety of social media assets and posters which local authorities and community and voluntary organisations may find useful for their own channels and networks. They include information on [how to prevent a UTI](#), [the symptoms](#) and an [infographic](#). These can be downloaded from [GoogleDrive](#). If you have issues accessing these materials, please email us externalaffairs@ukhsa.gov.uk. Examples of the available materials included below:

Posters:

Urinary Tract Infections (UTIs): know the symptoms
Information for older adults

How to avoid Urinary Tract Infections (UTIs)
Information for older adults

What is a UTI?

Urinary tract infections (UTIs) affect your urinary tract, including your bladder, urethra, or kidneys. Sometimes, a UTI can develop into a severe infection that can cause you to become very ill and you may then need to go to hospital

Here are some symptoms you may experience with a UTI

- Needing to pee more frequently**, suddenly, or more urgently than usual
- Pain or a burning sensation** when peeing
- Needing to pee at night** more often than usual
- New pain** in the lower tummy
- New incontinence or wetting yourself** that is worse than usual
- Kidney pain** or pain in the lower back
- Blood in the pee**
- Changes in behaviour**, such as acting agitated or confused (delirium). This could be a symptom of a UTI but could also be due to other causes, which need to be ruled out
- General signs of infection**, like a fever, a high temperature or feeling hot and shivery, with shaking (rigors) or chills
- A very low temperature** below 36°C

You may experience fewer of these symptoms if you have a urinary catheter

What you should do if you think you have a UTI?

Ensure you are drinking enough fluids regularly to avoid becoming dehydrated

Contact a healthcare professional: this could be your GP, nurse, the community pharmacist, a walk-in centre or the NHS 111 service

If you have frequent UTIs, please talk to a healthcare professional about treatment options

What is a UTI?

Urinary tract infections (UTIs) affect your urinary tract, including your bladder, urethra, or kidneys. Sometimes, a UTI can develop into a severe infection that can cause you to become very ill and you may then need to go to hospital

Here are some things you can do to prevent UTIs

Stay hydrated
Drink enough fluids regularly, like water or squash, to boost hydration. More trips to the toilet may be necessary, but don't reduce your intake

Don't hold it
Avoid holding your pee and visit the toilet as soon as possible when you need to go

Prioritise personal hygiene
Wash or shower daily, especially if you suffer from incontinence

Keep the genital area clean and dry with these tips

Wipe from front to back after using the toilet to prevent bacteria from spreading

Avoid using scented soaps, gels or sprays as they may cause irritation

Change incontinence pads frequently Don't wait if they're soiled

Before and after sex

Keep the skin clean around your genitals by washing with water before and after sexual activity

Go for a pee as soon as possible after sex

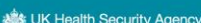

If you think you or someone you care for might have a UTI



Ensure you are drinking enough fluids regularly to avoid becoming dehydrated

Contact a healthcare professional: this could be your GP, nurse, the community pharmacist, a walk-in centre or the NHS 111 service

If you have frequent UTIs, please talk to a healthcare professional about treatment options

Social media assets:

What are the symptoms of a UTI?

Urinary tract infections (UTIs) affect your urinary tract. Sometimes, a UTI can develop into a severe infection that can cause you to become very ill and you may then need to go to hospital

How to avoid a UTI

Urinary tract infections (UTIs) affect your urinary tract. Sometimes, a UTI can develop into a severe infection that can cause you to become very ill and you may then need to go to hospital

Suggested copy for stakeholder publications

Please feel free to edit and crib from the below text as you see fit for your audience.

For older adults:

Urinary tract infections (UTIs) affect the urinary tract, including the bladder, urethra, or kidneys.

In some people, if left untreated, UTIs can lead to severe infection and sepsis that can cause you to be very ill and in need of hospital treatment.

As those over the age of 65 are at higher risk of complications, it is important for you to take steps to prevent UTIs and seek the appropriate treatment from a healthcare professional if you have symptoms.

Preventing a UTI

Whilst infection is sometimes unavoidable, staying well hydrated is key to keeping your body healthy and can help prevent you from getting a UTI, especially if you have repeated infections.

NHS [Eatwell guidance](#) states people should aim to drink 6 to 8 cups or glasses of fluid a day. Water, lower-fat milk and sugar-free drinks, including tea and coffee, all count.

Whilst hydration is an extremely important factor, so is ensuring you do not hold in your pee and that you go to the toilet as soon as possible when you need to. If you are having difficulties getting to the toilet or struggling with incontinence, we recommend that you speak to your doctor or nurse to refer you to the continence team who will be able to help you manage this going forward.

Keeping on top of your personal hygiene can also help. Whilst we understand it may not always be possible, bathing or showering daily, particularly if you suffer from incontinence, is recommended.

Other steps such as keeping the genital area clean and dry; changing incontinence pads often; wiping front to back when you go to the toilet; and avoid using scented soaps around the genital area, may help.

Washing the skin around the genitals with water before and after sex and going to pee as soon as possible after sex that may also reduce your chance of getting a UTI.

These proposed steps may seem like common sense but are extremely important in keeping you healthy.

Signs and symptoms

Following the above steps reduces your chances of getting an infection, but it is still vital to be able to identify the symptoms. They include:

- Needing to pee more frequently, suddenly, or more urgently than usual if you have not increased your liquid intake.
- Pain or a burning sensation when peeing.
- Needing to pee more often than usual during the night.
- New pain in the lower tummy.
- New or increased incontinence or wetting yourself.
- Kidney pain or pain in the lower back.
- Blood in your pee.
- Changes in behaviour, such as acting agitated or confused (delirium). This could be a symptom of a UTI but could also be due to other causes, which need to be ruled out.
- General signs of infection, like a fever, a high temperature or feeling hot and shivery, with shaking (rigors) or chills.
- A very low temperature, below 36°C.

What should you do if you think you have a UTI?

If you think you may have a UTI, you must seek advice from a healthcare professional – this could be your nurse, GP, community pharmacist, a walk-in centre or the NHS 111 service. They will be able to provide advice and discuss the best way to manage your symptoms.

If you have frequent or recurring UTIs, discuss this with a healthcare professional. They may be able to recommend or prescribe treatments that will help prevent your UTIs.

While you are seeking care, it is important that you drink plenty of fluids to avoid becoming dehydrated. If you are in pain, take paracetamol up to four times a day to reduce any discomfort.

Did you know that it's not always the same type of bacteria that causes a UTI and different antibiotics are needed to treat different bacteria? You should only take the antibiotics prescribed to you by your healthcare professional. If you are prescribed them, please take the full course as instructed to on the label.

If you have any questions about your treatment, please don't hesitate to ask your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

Resources which you may find useful

If you would like any further information on UTIs, [please visit the NHS page on UTIs](#).

Useful links

- For more information on UTIs please direct people to the [NHS Urinary Tract Infections webpage on NHS England's website](#).

Resources for carers and other healthcare professionals

- [NHS hydration video](#)
- [NHS catheter video](#)
- [NHS to dip or not to dip video](#)

About the UK Health Security Agency

UKHSA is responsible for protecting every member of every community from the impact of infectious diseases, chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear incidents and other health threats. We provide intellectual, scientific and operational leadership at national and local level, as well as on the global stage, to make the nation health secure.

[UKHSA](#) is an executive agency, sponsored by the [Department of Health and Social Care](#).

www.gov.uk/government/organisations/uk-health-security-agency

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