



BRIEFINGS FOR CARERS

SIGNS THAT A PERSON IS BECOMING UNWELL

What is the problem?

It is essential that any deterioration in a person's health is detected and acted on quickly. We know from reviews of deaths that some people die because those caring for them have not noticed or reacted quickly enough to a change in the person's health. People with learning disabilities are particularly vulnerable because they often rely on others to spot the signs that they are unwell.

Who is most at risk of deteriorating health?

- People with an existing health problem that is worsening
- People with existing chronic health conditions e.g. diabetes, heart disease
- People who are susceptible because of their age, poor mobility, poor nutritional status or frailty

Reducing the risk:

Know each person well so that you can identify any changes that may indicate they are becoming unwell.

Listen to the concerns of others who know the person well, and act on these

Use your intuition – if you think the person's health is deteriorating it probably is, so act on your 'gut instincts'

Use assessments such as recording body temperature, but don't rely on these measures alone

Look at the whole person - don't just focus on one part of the body or symptom

Communicate concerns effectively so you share the important information and get the response you need

Some signs of potential deteriorating health – one or more of these may be present

Change in consciousness/awareness – including subtle changes such as increased anxiety, confusion or restlessness

Change in heart and circulation – changes in heart/pulse rate, dizziness, feeling faint, chest pain, sweating. High (above 37.5°C) or low (35°C or below) body temperature, chills or shivering

Change in breathing – breaths sound different to usual, using effort to breathe, nostrils flaring when breathing, cough

Change in skin colour – mottling of skin, rash, pallor, blueish tinge to lips

Change in bowels – diarrhoea or vomiting, distended abdomen

Change in urine output –, change in quantity, colour or smell of urine (measure urine or weigh pads to check)

Other changes eg. pain, person not feeling well, change in appearance or behaviour

National Early Warning Scores (NEWS – 2)

A scoring system used in hospitals to identify acutely ill/deteriorating patients. NEWS-2 scores are based on: respiration rate, oxygen saturation, systolic blood pressure, pulse rate, level of consciousness or confusion, body temperature

Communicating information – SBAR

Situation – who you are, who the person is, signs and symptoms, what your concerns are

Background – how long the person has been ill, when their condition changed

Assessment – what you think the problem is

Recommendation – what you want to happen

