

HEALTH ALERT

*Office of Developmental Programs
Office of the Medical Director*

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NOROVIRUS

The Pennsylvania Department of Health (DOH) issued a health advisory about a higher than normal number of people getting sick with Norovirus this winter. People with Norovirus illnesses have been identified both in the community and in hospitals and nursing homes. Below is some information about Norovirus that can be used to prevent the disease.

What is Norovirus?

Norovirus is a stomach or GI virus that causes upset stomach, vomiting, and diarrhea. Vomiting seems to be more common in people with Norovirus than other GI viruses. People with Norovirus infections can also have muscle aches and fever. Usually the illness is mild, with GI symptoms lasting only a few days, but tiredness that may last a few more days.

Why is Norovirus a problem?

Norovirus is easily spread and people do not develop immunity to it so they can get it again and again. For people with other health problems, vomiting and diarrhea could lead to dehydration and need for treatment in the ER or hospital. Therefore, people that have vomiting and diarrhea should be watched to make sure that they are able to get enough fluids and are not getting dehydrated. Also, Norovirus lasts on surfaces for as long as a month and it is not killed by many of the common disinfectants that are used. This leads to prolonged exposure and more likelihood of getting infected.

How is Norovirus spread?

Norovirus is shed in stool and vomitus. It can be spread by food, water, or contact with hands or surfaces that have come in contact with infected substances. People that have Norovirus infection can shed the virus in their stool for a week.

How can you prevent Norovirus?

- Frequent hand washing with soap and water.
- Clean surfaces that have had vomitus or diarrhea promptly. Consider wearing gloves to clean.
 - Use a disinfectant approved for Norovirus by the Environmental Protection Agency or prepare a sodium hypochlorate solution by adding ½ cup (or more) of bleach to a gallon of water.
 - Steam clean carpet
 - Flush vomitus down the toilet and clean the toilet surface after
 - Increase frequency of cleaning floors, bathrooms, toilets, doorknobs, and other surfaces that people touch regularly
 - Wash sheets or clothing that have been soiled in hot water on the longest cycle and machine dry
- Exclude infected individuals from cooking or handling food
- Limit contact between infected and non-infected individuals as much as possible

What should you do if you think that people you know might have Norovirus?

- Contact your local health department communicable diseases division if there are a number of people that have the same symptoms
- Educate staff, visitors, and individuals receiving services about how to prevent Norovirus spread
- Implement the prevention strategies listed above

Where can you get more information about Norovirus?

Los Angeles Guidelines:

www.lapublichealth.org/acd/docs/Norovirus/NorovirusControlMeasures_12_1_06.pdf

U.S. National Park Service Protocol

www.nps.gov/public_health/inter/info/factsheets/fs_noro_r&c.htm

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Fact Sheet

www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/revb/gastro/norovirus-factsheet.htm

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention related to health care

www.cdc.gov/ncidod/hip/gastro/norovirus.htm

PA Department of Health

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