

Gastroenteritis in Residential Facilities

Gastroenteritis is often caused by norovirus. Symptoms of norovirus infection usually include nausea (N), vomiting (V), diarrhea (D), and some stomach cramping (C), which often begin suddenly. Some people have low-grade fever, chills, headache, muscle aches, and fatigue, and feel very sick. The illness is usually brief, with symptoms lasting about one to two days. Elderly or immune-compromised individuals may have illness lasting three to four days. Individuals may continue to shed virus and spread it to others for at least 48-72 hours after illness resolves.

Under Washington law, all outbreaks must be reported to the local health district. A norovirus outbreak should be suspected when two or more residents/staff have sudden onset of N, V, and/or D and C (*above*) with no other apparent cause. Testing of ill persons is recommended as soon as possible; PCR testing of stool, available through PAML, can determine if the illness is caused by norovirus.

When an outbreak is suspected or ongoing, the following measures should be implemented. Instituting these practices immediately and completely will greatly slow/prevent transmission of illness:

- Confine ill residents to their rooms until diarrhea/vomiting is resolved. When possible, ill residents should stay in their rooms until 48-72 hours after their illness has resolved. Do not permit ill residents to use spas or pools.
- When attending to any ill resident or when working in the resident's room, wear gloves. (*Mask/gown/eye protection may be needed if resident is actively ill.*) Gloves should be disposed of after a single use and hands should be washed/sanitized after removing gloves. Gloves should not be worn in the hallways.
- Bring meals to ill residents in their rooms; use a designated cart that only goes to rooms of ill residents.
- Use a designated cart (*not the food cart*) to transport items used to clean the rooms of ill residents; do not take this cart into the rooms of well residents.
- While wearing gloves, first clean (*to remove any debris*) and then apply *sanitizing solution** to the surface until it is visibly wet. Surfaces of concern include handrails, doorknobs, faucet handles, etc., in the rooms of ill residents, as well as in all bathrooms, and in all common areas. Allow solution to air dry on surface. Soiled carpets should be steam cleaned.
- Provide laundry services to ill residents every day. Soiled linens and clothing should be handled with gloved hands and covered during transport.
- If there is no sink available in the dining room, install a waterless hand sanitizing gel dispenser. Urge all residents and staff to wash hands before eating and before smoking.
- Admit no new residents to the facility/ward/ wing experiencing an illness outbreak. Refrain from transferring ill patients to units unaffected by the outbreak.
- Post notice in the employee area and on facility doors warning of the outbreak, urging ill volunteers and ill employees to stay away until well, and all others to refrain from visiting until the outbreak is over. Curtailment of social activities should be considered.
- Notify receiving facility or person of outbreak before transferring or discharging any patient.
- Avoid circulating staff from affected to unaffected units.
- When possible, restrict employees and volunteers from work until 48-72 hours after their illness is resolved. All food service employees **must** remain off work until 48-72 hours after their illness is resolved.

The outbreak can be said to be over when seven days have elapsed since the resolution of symptoms in the last case (*resident or staff member*). This will be determined in consultation with SRHD Epidemiology Staff.

* **Sanitizing solution** should be 1/3 cup bleach in 1 gallon of water, with a contact time of 5-10 minutes (*let air dry*). In areas with heavy soiling or resistant surfaces, a solution of up to 1-2/3 cups per gallon of water can be used. Solution should be prepared daily.

OR

Approved non-bleach solutions - see <http://epa.gov/oppad001/chemregindex.htm> or check the product label (*must specify effectiveness against Norovirus*).