

January 23, 2013

Dear School Health Nurses

The Florida Department of Health has detected a new type of norovirus that is causing illness in Florida called norovirus GII.4 Sydney. Noroviruses are the most common cause of gastrointestinal (e.g. vomiting and diarrhea) illness and outbreaks, particularly in the winter months. The disease is very easily spread from person to person. Group settings such as schools and other group settings such as day care facilities are at increased risk for norovirus outbreaks. The emergence of new noroviruses can cause an increased number of outbreaks.

In preparation for a potential increase in norovirus outbreaks in the upcoming months, we recommend that facilities institute measures to prevent norovirus outbreaks. Additionally we recommend that school healthcare facilities conduct surveillance for increases in gastrointestinal illness among children and staff, and implement outbreak control measures should increases occur.

Norovirus is characterized by:

- Symptoms of Noro virus infection include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and abdominal cramps. Headache and low-grade fever may also occur. People usually recover within 2-3 days without serious or long-term effects.

Norovirus can be spread by:

Hands contaminated with feces and not washed thoroughly and frequently are the most common cause of the spread of Norovirus

People can reduce their chance of getting infected by frequent hand washing, prompt disinfection of contaminated surfaces with household bleach-based cleaners and prompt washing of soiled articles or clothing.

Prevention and control recommendations for facilities:

- Follow hand-hygiene guidelines and carefully wash hands with soap and water after contact with patients with suspected norovirus infection or diarrhea of any cause;
- Use gowns and gloves when in contact with or caring for children and patients who are symptomatic with norovirus. Routinely clean and disinfect high-touch patient surfaces and equipment with an Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-approved product with a label claim for norovirus, or use a dilute bleach solution (5-25 tablespoons per gallon of water or a dilution of 1:10 to 1:100 v/v depending on the amount of organic material such as blood, mucus, and urine that are present on the surface to be cleaned and disinfected);
- Remove and wash contaminated clothing or linens;

- Exclude workers and teachers who have symptoms consistent with norovirus infection from work; and
- Report three or more cases of illness with similar gastrointestinal symptoms that occur within 24 hours among residents or staff at your facility to your County Health Department. (437-7350 x 2226)

Additional recommendations for norovirus prevention and management of norovirus outbreaks in healthcare settings can be found at: <http://www.cdc.gov/HAI/organisms/norovirus.html#a4>, <http://doh.state.fl.us/environment/medicine/foodsveillance/norovirus.htm>, and www.cdc.gov/norovirus

Best regards,

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Administrator
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