

## Gastrointestinal Illness

### What is a Norovirus illness?

Norovirus is a group of viruses that cause acute gastroenteritis, often called the “stomach flu” or “winter vomiting disease”. This is not influenza or the flu, which is a respiratory infection caused by the influenza virus. These illnesses may be referred to as Noro-like illnesses in the absence of lab confirmation.

### What are the symptoms of Norovirus or Noro-like illness?

- diarrhea (three or more episodes of loose stools within a 24 hour period), nausea, vomiting, abdominal cramping and fever
- sometimes headaches and muscle ache

### How are Norovirus or Noro-like illnesses spread?

Norovirus can be found in the vomit and diarrhea of people who are sick. When someone vomits, people nearby may become infected by swallowing tiny droplets from the air.

The virus can also be spread on surfaces like taps and countertops and survive there for a long time if not properly cleaned.

People can become ill when they touch these surfaces and then place their hands or fingers in their mouth. The virus can be spread among people if they do not wash their hands or if someone with this illness handles food, water or ice.

### When is a person infectious?

People with Norovirus are infectious while symptomatic and for minimum of 48 hours after cessation of symptoms.

### When is an employee exposed?

Employees are exposed when they have had direct or indirect contact with infectious feces or vomit.

### What happens if an employee is exposed to a Norovirus or Noro-like Illness?

- Exposed employees must self monitor for the symptoms of gastrointestinal illness (diarrhea, nausea, vomiting, abdominal cramping, fever and sometimes headaches and muscle ache)
- There are no modifications of work practices or work restrictions for exposed asymptomatic employees

### What happens if an employee has a Norovirus or Noro-like Illness?

Employees who have symptoms while at work or at home:

- Must report IMMEDIATELY to their manager and leave the worksite/not come onto the worksite
- Contact the Workplace Health Call Centre Occupational Health Nurse (WHCC OHN) at 1-866-922-9464
- Must remain away from the worksite for a minimum of 48 hours\* after cessation of diarrhea and vomiting. Employees must not return to work even if they are feeling better, until the 48 hour\* period is over as individuals can continue to shed the virus even if they are no longer ill.
- If anti-diarrheal medications have been taken, must stay away from the worksite until diarrhea-free for at least 48 hours\* after the cessation of medications.

*\*The Medical Health Officer or alternate may increase the exclusion period*

### What about other Gastrointestinal Illnesses?

There are different guidelines for other G.I. illnesses. Exclusion periods and follow up requirements vary. Contact the WHCC OHN at 1-866-922-9464 if you have symptoms of diarrhea and/or vomiting. You may be advised to remain off work and to follow up with your family physician for further examination and testing.

### **Manager/Supervisor Responsibilities:**

Exclude symptomatic staff and advise them to call the WHCC OHN at 1-866-922-9464. Consult with Infection Control for enhanced cleaning and follow up.

### **Prevention Strategies/Education:**

- Hand washing is the best defense and prevention measure
- Alcohol hand sanitizers may be used when hands are not visibly soiled. However, food handlers should not use alcohol hand sanitizers as a substitute for hand washing. These products are not fully effective against bacterial spores, oocysts, and viruses such as Norovirus and hepatitis A.
- Refrain from sharing food where there is the potential for contamination.
- Persons infected with G.I. (gastrointestinal) illness should not prepare food while they have symptoms and for 2 days after they recover from their illness
- Thoroughly clean and disinfect contaminated surfaces immediately after an episode of illness by using a **bleach solution**.
  - a. Household Bleach (5.25% hypochlorite)
    - Bleach should be mixed to make a 1:50 solution for disinfection purposes (for example, add 80 ml to 4 litres of warm water; 1/3 cup of bleach to a gallon of water).
    - Allow the surfaces to air dry after application to achieve the required contact time.
    - Bleach is a corrosive product and should not be mixed with other cleaning products
    - The bleach solution should be made within the previous 24 hours (or freshly prepared) to be most effective.
- Check your site's Infection Control manual for proper procedures

### **Employee Responsibilities:**

Infected employees: please contact the WHCC OHN at 1-866-922-9464 and review the information above.

### **Additional Information/References:**

- Canada Communicable Disease Report. [Prevention & Control of Occupational Infections in Health Care](#). March 2002. Retrieved on April 17, 2013
- BC Centre for Disease Control. [Management of Gastrointestinal Illness Outbreaks in Child Care Facilities](#). January 2011. Retrieved on April 17, 2013.
- BC Centre for Disease Control. [Gastrointestinal Infection Outbreak Guidelines for Healthcare Facilities](#). December 8, 2014. Retrieved on August 2, 2017.
- BC Centre for Disease Control. [Enteric Cases and Their Contacts: Exclusion from High Risk Settings](#). October 2011. Retrieved on April 17, 2013
- HealthLinkBC File. [Norovirus](#). February 2016. Retrieved on August 2, 2017.
- BC Centre for Disease Control. [Norovirus / Norowalk-like virus](#). March 15, 2012. Retrieved on August 2, 2017.