

DATE: February 3, 2017 **END DATE:** March 26, 2017

CONTACT: Danielle Steplowski, MS
Epidemiologist

PHONE: (810) 257-3815

RE: Norovirus Season

Genesee County has seen a recent increase in gastrointestinal illnesses which causes mild to severe diarrhea. “We would like to remind everyone that Genesee County normally experiences an increase in gastroenteritis illnesses this time of year, but we continue to watch this closely,” stated Genesee County Health Department Health Officer, Mark Valacak. The viruses that cause gastrointestinal issues can be easily spread by food, person-to-person contact, aerosolization (of vomited material), or contaminated surfaces and objects. The Genesee County Health Department would like to make sure that everyone stays healthy and takes the proper precautions to protect themselves and others from illness.

Norovirus, incorrectly known as ‘stomach flu,’ is one of the most common causes of gastroenteritis in the United States, and it spreads quickly. Norovirus is **NOT** related to the flu (influenza), which is a respiratory illness caused by a different virus.

Symptoms normally include:

- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Stomach cramping

Other symptoms:

- Low-grade fever
- Headache
- Fatigue
- Muscle aches

To note:

- Symptoms begin 1-2 days after exposure but can present as early as 10 hours
- Symptoms usually only last between 1-2 days

Norovirus is very contagious and can live on surfaces for a very long time. It can be easily spread from person-to-person, especially in group settings, such as gatherings, daycares/schools, restaurants, and nursing homes. Individuals can reduce their risk of becoming infected through frequent hand washing using soap and warm water for a minimum of 20 seconds. Alcohol based hand sanitizers do **NOT** prevent the spread of norovirus. In most cases, ill persons recover on their own. The very young and elderly are at higher risk for dehydration. Those with severe diarrhea should drink plenty of fluids.

Preventing contamination of food, drinks and surfaces is critical to preventing the spread of norovirus. Anyone with norovirus should not prepare or serve food until they have been symptom-free for three days. It is important to carefully wash fruits and vegetables before preparing and eating them.

The spread of norovirus can be prevented by disinfecting contaminated surfaces with household chlorine bleach-based cleaners and prompt washing of contaminated articles of clothing. Anyone showing symptoms such as vomiting and diarrhea should not go to daycare, school, or work until symptoms have subsided. Persons who work in nursing homes, take care of patients, or handle food should stay out of work for two to three days after symptoms end.

Fact sheets and additional information about how to prevent the spread of norovirus can be found at www.gchd.us. The Genesee County Health Department wants everyone to stay healthy this winter season.

Genesee County Health Department. Your Health. Our Work.