

MEDIA RELEASE

DATE: March 19, 2019

END DATE: April 30, 2019

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RE: Wash Your Hands to Prevent the Spread of Norovirus

Genesee County Health Department (GCHD) reports a recent increase in gastrointestinal illness activity, including norovirus (viral gastroenteritis), and would like to remind everyone of the precautions that can be taken to protect themselves and others from illness. The viruses that cause gastrointestinal issues can be easily spread by infected people to others, through contaminated food or drinks, aerosolization (of vomited material), or contaminated surfaces and objects. Individuals can reduce their risk of becoming ill through frequent hand washing using soap and warm water for a minimum of 20 seconds, safe food handling, and good hygiene. Hand sanitizers do NOT prevent the spread of norovirus. GCHD 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 the most common cause of vomiting and diarrhea from gastroenteritis in the U.S., 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 pain

Other symptoms:

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

To note:

- Most norovirus outbreaks happen from November to April
- Symptoms begin 1-2 days after exposure but can present as early as 10 hours
- Young and elderly are at higher risk for dehydration



Norovirus is highly contagious, can live on surfaces for a very long time, and can be easily spread from person-to-person, especially in group settings, such as family gatherings, daycares/schools, restaurants, and nursing homes. Most people recover within 1 to 3 days, but can continue to shed the virus in their feces for several days after their symptoms disappear. Anyone showing symptoms such as vomiting and diarrhea should not go to daycare, school, or work for at least 2 days after symptoms end.

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 3 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 bleach-based cleaners and prompt washing of contaminated articles of clothing.

There is no specific treatment for norovirus. Individuals with severe diarrhea or vomiting should drink plenty of liquids to replace fluid loss and prevent dehydration.

You can find norovirus fact sheets, information on to how to prevent the spread of norovirus, and additional prevention information at www.gchd.us.

Genesee County Health Department. Your Health. Our Work

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