



Norovirus Outbreak Management for Child Care Centres

What is Norovirus?

Norovirus was recently approved as the official name for the group of viruses provisionally described as “Norwalk-like viruses”. Norovirus is a common cause of viral gastroenteritis. This illness is often referred to as ‘stomach flu’. Norovirus infections have been linked to outbreaks of vomiting and/or diarrhea in institutions such as child care centres, camps and schools.

Norovirus can be spread from person-to-person easily and only a small amount of the virus is needed to make someone sick. The virus can spread by touching contaminated hands of someone who is ill or by touching objects that are contaminated with the virus (i.e. doorknobs, railings, light switches, clothing and cloth covered furniture).

Norovirus can survive relatively high levels of disinfectant and varying temperatures (freezing to 60°C).

After being exposed to Norovirus, symptoms can start anywhere between 10 hours up to 2 days. The illness normally lasts between 24-72 hours. There is usually a sudden onset of nausea, vomiting, abdominal cramps and watery diarrhea. Headache, fever, chills, weakness and muscle pain may also occur.

Prevention

Reducing the person-to-person transmission of Norovirus is challenging because only a small amount of the virus is needed to infect others, it can be spread by touching objects commonly touched, and young children frequently put their hands and objects into their mouths.

Declaring a Norovirus Outbreak

Outbreaks should be declared in consultation with the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU). Child Care Centres experiencing an increase in gastroenteritis symptoms above what is normal (above their normal baseline illness rates) should consider a possible outbreak and consult with the SMDHU Communicable Diseases Team.

Control measures for Norovirus outbreaks in child care centres:

- Frequent handwashing with soap and water for 15 seconds is the most important means of prevention. Staff and children should wash their hands after they go to the bathroom and before they prepare or eat foods. The additional use of alcohol based hand rub may be used when hands are not visibly soiled.
- Children and staff that are symptomatic should be excluded from the child care centre. They may return to the centre after they are 48 hours symptom free (48 hours with no diarrhea or vomiting).
- Foodborne outbreaks caused by food handlers infected with Norovirus have been reported. Food handlers that demonstrate symptoms of Norovirus should be excluded from food handling until they are symptom free for 48 to 72 hours.
- Enteric precautions (routine practices) should be used when cleaning up vomit or feces. Wearing gloves, protective eyewear, a fluid resistant gown and practicing good handwashing will protect staff from acquiring the virus.

For more information call the Communicable
Disease Team ext. 8809



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Your Health Connection

- Soiled clothes should be handled as little as possible, placed in a plastic bag and sent home with the ill child.
- Use of cloth diapers should be discontinued for the duration of the outbreak.
- Surfaces and toys that are routinely touched should be cleaned frequently and then disinfected using a disinfectant effective against Norovirus.
- Outbreak notification signs should be posted for parents/visitors advising them of the outbreak, not to enter the facility if they are unwell and to encourage all visitors to wash their hands upon entering the building.
- Field trips should be cancelled until the outbreak is under control or declared over.
- Sensory play activities should be cancelled during the outbreak.
- All ill cases should be included on an outbreak line listing, the line lists should be updated daily and faxed into the health unit.
- Once the outbreak is declared, stool specimen collection for testing should begin. For maximum sensitivity, specimens should be taken within 48 hours of onset while stools are still liquid or semisolid. A total of three sample vials (bacterial, parasite and viral testing) should be collected in one Enteric Outbreak Kit for each child/staff being tested. Enteric Outbreak Kit specimens should be kept refrigerated at 4°C after collection, and arrangements should be made through SMDHU for transport of the samples to the public health laboratory.
- For additional recommendations on managing Norovirus and other gastroenteritis outbreaks, see the outbreak management chapter of the Keeping Kids Healthy and Safe Resource Manual available on the SMDHU website at: <http://www.simcoemuskokahealth.org/JFY/ChildcareWorkers/manual/resourcemanual.aspx>