

## **Gastrointestinal Illness Outbreaks: Information for Summer Camps**

### **What is a gastrointestinal illness?**

A gastrointestinal illness (GI) causes problems with your stomach and intestines. It can cause you to have nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea. Other symptoms can include:

- abdominal cramps
- headache
- low-grade fever
- muscle aches

The symptoms can be mild, moderate, or severe. The start of symptoms may be quick and will usually last between 12 to 60 hours. Most healthy people get better quickly. It's important to know that a person is still contagious for up to 48 hours after they feel well.

### **What is Norovirus?**

One of the most common causes of GI is Norovirus. Norovirus is very contagious and can spread easily from person to person. While it's often called the 24-hour flu or stomach flu, Norovirus is not related to influenza, which is a respiratory illness.

Norovirus is most common in fall and winter (September to April). It's spread by:

- eating food or drinking water infected with Norovirus
- being around someone who is ill
- touching surfaces contaminated with the virus (e.g., hands, counters, taps, bathrooms)

There will be virus in both the stool and vomit. You can protect yourself by washing your hands well (this is called hand hygiene) and having good personal hygiene practices (keeping yourself and your belongings clean).

### **What is an outbreak of gastrointestinal illness?**

An outbreak may be suspected in a summer camp when there are 2 or more campers or staff with the same group of symptoms that started within 48 hours of one another. The symptoms should be unusual for that person. New medicines, changes in a medical condition, recent laxative use, and food allergies or sensitivities should be ruled out.

If an outbreak of diarrhea and/or vomiting is suspected, it must be reported right away to AHS Central Zone Environmental Public Health on-call at 1-866-654-7890.

When a potential outbreak is identified and reported to Public Health, AHS Public Health staff will provide information and recommendations to staff to help prevent further spread of illness. They may also:

- Help test sick children or staff (as appropriate, or recommended by the Zone Medical Officer of Health) to find out what caused the outbreak. If testing is done, contact information for parents and or staff will be needed.
- Provide information letters to parents (as appropriate) informing them of the outbreak and providing information on how to prevent the spread of illness at home

## Who will need to go home during an outbreak?

All campers and staff who are ill will need to go home.

- Sick campers should be moved to an area away from other campers until they can be picked up by their parent/guardian. Most staff should stay away from them (only have 1 person check in on them or stay with them).
- Parents or guardians of sick campers should be called and told to come to take their child home.
- Staff feeling ill should be moved to an area away from campers and other staff until they can go home.
- If possible, there should be a bathroom for use only by the sick campers and staff.
- Sick campers and staff should not return until at least 48 hours after the last time they had either vomited and/or had diarrhea.

## What do parents and family members need to know?

- Watch sick campers and staff.
- Review the things that staff can do to control the illness.
- Public Health has a letter that can be sent home with campers and staff that provides information about Norovirus.

## When should I wash my hands?

- It's very important for **everyone** to have good hand hygiene to stop the spread of the virus.
- Wash your hands before all meals. Also wash your hands before and after handling foods or caring for a camper.
- Wash your hands with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand rub after:
  - using the bathroom
  - blowing or wiping your nose
  - coughing or sneezing in your hand
  - handling animals
- Alcohol-based hand rubs do not replace proper hand washing and should not be used when hands are visibly soiled. They should only be used when you can't wash your hands with soap and water.
- Always wash your hands with soap and water if they are dirty or you were caring for someone (including cleaning up body fluids) with vomiting and/or diarrhea.
- Staff should help campers who can't wash their own hands.

## What areas of the camp will need extra cleaning and disinfection?

- All surfaces that get touched a lot (e.g., handrails, door knobs, table tops, light switches, sink taps, kitchen counter tops) must be cleaned and disinfected at least once a day during the outbreak. If possible, they should be cleaned twice a day.
- Bathrooms and toilet areas should be cleaned and disinfected at least twice a day.
- Use a "wipe twice" process to clean and disinfect surfaces. Wipe surfaces thoroughly to clean the dirt you can see, then them wipe again with a clean cloth filled with disinfectant.
- There are 2 ways you can disinfect surfaces during a gastrointestinal illnesses outbreak:
  - a) Make a diluted bleach solution—mix 75 ml (5 tbsp.) of fresh household bleach [5.25% sodium hypochlorite (SH)] in 4 liters of water. Make a fresh solution every day. If using other commercial hypochlorite containing solutions, follow the manufacturer's direction for preparation.  
**Note:** Surfaces must be cleaned first before using a hypochlorite product (2-step process). If the product claims it is a detergent and disinfectant, it may be used for both steps.

- b) Use a disinfectant issued by Health Canada. Make sure the label says it works against norovirus, feline calicivirus, or murine norovirus (e.g., 0.5% accelerated hydrogen peroxide). Check the label of other products to see if they work against norovirus.
- Once the camper or staff member has been isolated, the room that they are in should be cleaned and disinfected. After they have gone home, the room should be cleaned again.
  - Handle dirty and soiled laundry as little as possible. Try not to shake the laundry or move it around as it can contaminate the air and spread the virus.
  - Put dirty laundry (either wet or moist) in a sealed plastic bag. Wash them with detergent and hot water at the maximum cycle length and then dry them using the hottest setting for dryer. After washing the laundry, the washer should be run empty with 1 cup of chlorine bleach and water.
  - Personal protective equipment (gowns, gloves, masks, and eye protection) need to be available for staff in contact with surfaces heavily contaminated with vomit or diarrhea. These surfaces should be cleaned according to the document *Cleaning and Disinfecting Blood Spills, Feces, Vomit, and Other Body Fluids*.
  - Staff doing the cleaning and disinfecting (including soiled laundry) should use utility gloves and gowns. Gloves should be washed inside and out after each use and hung to air dry. These gloves should only be used by 1 person. The staff member may choose to wear disposable gloves inside the utility glove for comfort.

#### **What extra protection is needed around food?**

- Food should be served to ill campers and staff in their room.
- Sick campers and staff should not be in areas where food is being handled and prepared.
- Staff who clean and disinfect camp should not be involved in food service.
- Do not put out any common food that people can help themselves to.
- All dining room tables and chairs (including the underneath edge of the chair seat) should be cleaned and disinfected after each meal.
- The use of disposable dishes is not required during outbreaks.
- Wash fruits and vegetables thoroughly.
- Food that may have been contaminated by a sick camper or sick staff member should be thrown out.

#### **When can we consider the outbreak over?**

- Keep doing the extra cleaning and other measures until you're told by your outbreak response lead that the outbreak has been declared over.
- After your outbreak has been declared over, your camp should remain on the lookout for any new cases for 72 hours. Any new cases should be reported right away.