

MSAD # 13 / RSU #83

Health Alert

Diarrhea

Important Notice to Parents

Diarrhea Description Infectious diarrhea, sometimes with abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting, or fever, has many causes. Most cases are due to viruses, but other causes include bacteria and parasites like Giardia. Type and severity of symptoms vary by the causative organism and the resistance of the person infected. Fecal-oral transmission (carrying an infection from human feces to the mouth) is a common means of infection. Transmission can also be through contaminated food, water, or swimming water. Salmonella, E. coli, Cryptosporidium, and Giardia are carried by animals and can be transmitted if animal waste is carried to a person's mouth. Determining the specific cause of infectious diarrhea is difficult in a school setting.

A student with severe or persistent diarrhea, especially if accompanied by fever and cramps, should be referred for medical care. A common source of infection could cause multiple cases in a given group (e.g., classroom, school, outdoor education program) within a short period of time.

Agent Description, Incubation, Infectious Period, Duration:

- Clostridium Difficile
 - Watery, diarrhea, fever, sometimes nausea and abdominal pain.
 - Unknown
 - During illness, up to 48 hours after diarrhea clears. (individuals may carry without symptoms)
- Variable E. Coli
 - Diarrhea, cramps, may have blood in stool or severe complications
 - 1–9 days (usually 3–4)
 - During illness and as long as organism is in stool (usually 1–4 weeks)
 - Variable (days to weeks)
- Giardia and Cryptosporidium
 - Diarrhea (pale, greasy with Giardia); cramps; fatigue; weight loss; may be asymptomatic
 - 5–25 days or longer; median 7–10 days
 - During entire infection, which may be asymptomatic
 - Variable (weeks to months)
- Hepatitis A
 - Diarrhea, jaundice; may be asymptomatic
 - 5–50 days (usually 28– 30 days)
 - Before and during symptoms
 - Variable (usually weeks)
- Salmonella
 - Cramps, diarrhea, nausea, vomiting, may have blood or pus in stool, may have fever
 - 6–72 hours (usually 12– 36)
 - During illness and as long as organism is in stool (usually 1–4 weeks)
 - Variable (days to weeks)
- Shigella
 - Diarrhea, fever, vomiting, cramps, may have blood or pus in stool.
 - 1–7 days (usually 2–4).
 - During illness and as long as organism is in stool (usually 1–4 weeks)
 - Variable (days to weeks)
- Viral gastroenteritis (also called stomach flu)
 - Low fever, vomiting, cramps, diarrhea, body aches, headache
 - Usually 24–72 hours
 - During illness and shortly thereafter
 - 1–2 days

Handwashing is the best prevention for the prevention and spread of bacteria, parasites and viruses that cause diarrhea. It is especially important before eating and after using the bathroom or changing a diaper because diarrheal illness is so often spread via the oral fecal route.

Protect all your food from contamination. Be sure to properly prepare, refrigerate, cook, and serve all food. Raw milk and raw eggs should not be eaten.

Animals including mammals, birds, reptiles, and amphibians can carry Salmonella, E. coli, Giardia, Cryptosporidium, and other causes of diarrhea. Baby chicks or ducks, wild animals, small "silver dollar" turtles, and animals with diarrhea are not appropriate for classrooms. Children should practice careful handwashing after touching or handling other animals. Hand sanitizers are not appropriate for such situations.

Students should be kept at home during the times that symptoms make them uncomfortable or as advised by their health care provider. Any individual ill with diarrhea should not swim in pools or lakes and should not handle food to be eaten by others until symptoms are gone.

Please contact the school nurse, Mel Chadbourne, RN if you have any questions. More information is also available at the Maine CDC web site.

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