

**MSAD # 13 / RSU #83
Health Alert**

**Gastrointestinal Illness – Norovirus
Important Notice to Parents
<Date>**

Noroviruses, the most common causes of viral gastroenteritis, are very contagious, with symptoms including watery diarrhea, stomach cramps, nausea, vomiting, headache, muscle aches, and fatigue. Most cases have no fever or a slight fever. Illness is self-limiting, and symptoms generally last 24 - 48 hours. Although often termed “stomach flu,” norovirus infection should not be confused with influenza, which is a respiratory illness. It appears that immunity for noroviruses may be strain-specific and lasts only a few months. Therefore, due to the different types of noroviruses, individuals are likely to be repeatedly infected throughout their lifetimes.

Symptoms usually begin 24 - 48 hours (range of 12 - 72 hours) after exposure but can occur as quickly as 12 hours after exposure.

Norovirus is transmitted by the fecal-oral route. Norovirus is primarily shed in stools and is easily spread person-to-person by hands, toys, bathroom surfaces, and contaminated food. It can also be transmitted by aerosolized vomitus to persons nearby. The viruses can persist on surfaces, so infection can occur several days after the initial contamination unless thorough cleaning is done.

A person can spread norovirus when experiencing symptoms and up to 72 hours after recovery. Infectious Period Peak viral shedding is 2–5 days after infection, and some studies indicate that those infected can shed virus for two weeks or more after recovery. Only a very small dose of virus is needed to cause infection. Some infected individuals may not show symptoms.

Any ill individuals should remain home during the symptomatic period and for at least 24 hours after all symptoms resolve. If your child is sick during the day, please do not send them to school the next day even if they are feeling fine

Frequent hand washing, particularly after using the restroom, assisting someone with diarrhea and/or vomiting, after contact with animals, after swimming, and before and after food preparation will help prevent contact with the virus. Also, remove any contaminated clothing or linens immediately. Thoroughly clean any contaminated surfaces with a detergent and then disinfect with an EPA-approved disinfectant for norovirus. If cleaning with a bleach solution, remember bleach solutions for disinfecting must be prepared fresh daily.

There are many strains of noroviruses. It appears that immunity for noroviruses may be strain-specific and lasts only a few months. Therefore, due to the different types of noroviruses, individuals are likely to be repeatedly infected throughout their lifetimes.

Contact your primary care provider if gastrointestinal symptoms last more than a few days or are severe or if signs of dehydration are observed.

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