

Residential Care and Assisted Living Newsletter

Gold Awards—No Deficiencies

- New Beginnings #2—Idaho Falls
- Living Springs, Inc.— Post Falls

Silver Awards— Three or Fewer Non-Core Deficiencies

- River Rock Assisted Living
 Buhl
- Cottages of Middleton
 Middleton
- Birchwood Retirement Estates — Twin Falls

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Norovirus

Norovirus accounts for 90% of gastroenteritis outbreaks that are not caused by bacteria or toxins. When someone is infected with Norovirus, they may refer to it as the "stomach flu" or "food poisoning." It's true that Norovirus can be transmitted through food, yet other viruses, bacteria, and chemicals can cause "food poisoning" as well. Norovirus may be referred to as the "stomach flu," but it's not related to the flu, which is an illness caused by the Influenza virus that causes respiratory symptoms. Norovirus causes gastroenteritis in people, which is an inflammation of the lining of the stomach and intestines. As a result, those infected with Norovirus may experience nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and stomach cramping. Less commonly, some people may experience a low grade fever, chills, muscle aches, and a headache. Most people will suddenly get very sick, but recover within one or two days. However, the elderly or those with weakened immune systems are at risk for severe consequences. It's important that your facility staff have knowledge of this virus since many of the residents in assisted living are at high risk of having complications.

The Centers for Disease Control estimates that more than 20 million cases of gastroenteritis from the Norovirus occur each year. In other words, one in every 15 people will get this illness each year. It's estimated that 70,000 cases will result in hospitalization and 800 cases will result in death. There's no cure for Norovirus and no vaccine to prevent it, which is why prevention and early identification of an outbreak is essential, especially in an assisted living facility where residents may be more vulnerable than the general population. Additionally, these residents are often in close contact with each other, allowing the viruses to spread rapidly.

In order to understand how to prevent Norovirus, it's important to understand how it's transmitted. Norovirus is found in the vomit and stool of infected people. Therefore, you or your residents can get it by:

- Eating or drinking food contaminated with the virus (e.g., getting stool or vomit on your hands then touching food or drink that others eat).
- Touching your mouth after touching a surface or object contaminated with Norovirus.
- Having direct contact with someone infected (e.g., a caregiver caring for an ill resident).

It's also important to understand that people are contagious from the moment they begin feeling ill until at least three days after recovery. Some people who are asymptomatic may still shed the virus. To make matters worse, Noroviruses can survive varying temperatures, from freezing to 140 F°, and can withstand relatively high levels of chlorine. Due to the lipid envelope of Noroviruses, alcohols and detergents are often ineffective. The viruses can survive up to 12 days on contaminated fabrics and 12 hours on hard surfaces. Not only is the virus hardy, but potent as well; it takes just 20 virus particles to cause an infection!



Norovirus (cont)

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To prevent this highly contagious virus:

- Remind staff, residents, volunteers, and visitors to be more conscientious about hand washing and infection control.
- Carefully wash fruits and vegetables and thoroughly cook oysters and other shellfish before serving them.
- Prevent anyone with any gastroenteritis symptoms (nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea) from preparing food.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces that could be contaminated. A bleach-based cleaner should be used according to the product label. If no cleaning product is available, make a cleaning solution that has between 5 tablespoons and 1.5 cups of bleach per gallon of water (depending on the surface).
- Ensure that laundry contaminated with vomit or stools is not agitated (to avoid spreading the virus) and wash it immediately.
- Wear gloves while handling soiled clothes and wash your hands after handling laundry

Even with the best prevention methods, chances are someone within your facility will be infected with Norovirus at some time. The presence of diarrhea in one or two residents in a large assisted living facility may not be that abnormal, so determining if there is an outbreak can be somewhat subjective. If the presence of more diarrhea or vomiting than would normally be expected is observed within the facility, an outbreak should be suspected, the facility should investigate if others (residents and staff) are ill, and staff should begin implementing strict infection control practices. If a resident is suspected to have Norovirus, your health department or the Office of Epidemiology must be notified within 24 hours at:

- The Office of Epidemiology: (208) 334-5939.
- Idaho Public Health Offices:
 - Panhandle Health (Boundary, Bonner, Kootenai, Benewah & Shoshone Counties). http://www.phd1.idaho.gov/clinical/commdiseasereport.cfm. Fax the communicable disease reporting form found on the website to: (208) 772-3920 or (866) 716-2599.
 - North Central (Latah, Nez Perce, Lewis & Idaho Counties). http://idahopublichealth.com/78-community-health/77-infectious-disease. Call (208) 799-3100 or (866) 736-6632
 - Southwest District (Adams, Washington, Payette, Gem, Canyon & Owyhee Counties). http://www.swdh.org/contact-us.asp. Call (208) 455-5300.
 - Central District (Valley, Ada, Boise & Elmore Counties). http://www.cdhd.idaho.gov/CD/pros/reportingcd.htm. Call (208) 334-5939 during business hours or (800) 632-8000 after hours.
 - South Central (Camas, Blaine, Gooding, Lincoln, Jerome, Minidoka, Twin Falls & Cassia Counties). http://www.phd5.idaho.gov/Providers/Reporting.htm. Call (800) 632-5927 to report 24 hours a day. If you need immediate assistance, call (208) 334-5939 or (800) 632-8000.
 - Southeastern (Butte, Bingham, Power, Bannock, Caribou, Oneida, Franklin & Bear Lake Counties). http://www.sdhdidaho.org/hpro/epi_comm.php. Call (800) 632-5927.
 - Eastern (Lemhi, Custer, Clark, Fremont, Jefferson, Madison, Teton & Bonneville). http://www.phd7.idaho.gov/Infectious%20Disease/infectiousdiseasemain.html. Call (208) 533-3140 or (208) 533-3142.

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Norovirus (cont)

If you suspect an outbreak, consider immediately implementing the following outbreak

If you suspect an outbreak, consider immediately implementing the following outbreak control interventions for each of the following groups:

Staff

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- Ill staff should be excluded from work until at least two days after diarrhea and vomiting have stopped, even if they are feeling better sooner.
- If your facility is large, staff should not float from one wing or area to another.
- Disposable gloves and gowns should be used when caring for ill residents.
- Face masks should be worn when cleaning up vomit or feces.
- A meeting should be scheduled to review infection control measures with staff.

Residents

- Place ill residents on contact precautions.
- Ask ill residents to remain in their rooms as much as possible until at least two days after symptoms subside.
- Ask staff to make an effort to decrease ill residents' feelings of isolation.
- Consider having family members call residents frequently (if able).
- Consider limiting group activities.
- If your facility is large, don't move residents from an affected area to an unaffected area.
- If possible, maintain the same staff-to-resident assignments.
- Encourage fluid intake to prevent dehydration.
- Monitor residents for dehydration symptoms such as dizziness when standing, decreased urination, sunken eyes, and dry mouth and tongue. Notify the doctor and the facility RN of any concerns.
- If a resident is transferred to the hospital, notify the hospital of suspected Norovirus.

Facility

- Consider halting new admissions until the outbreak is over.
- Follow your infection control policy and clean bathroom and common areas more frequently with an appropriate hospital grade disinfectant or a bleach solution that contains between 5 tablespoons and 1.5 cups of bleach per gallon of water (depending on the surface).
- Disinfect common use medical equipment (such as blood pressure cuffs) between uses.
- Flush vomit or feces in toilets immediately.
- Handle soiled linen as little as possible and ensure it is laundered in hot water and machine dried.
- Consider alerting visitors by posting signs informing them that the facility is experiencing an increase in gastrointestinal illness.
- Encourage visitors and volunteers to wash their hands while in the facility.
- Ask anyone with symptoms to not come for a visit until they are feeling better.

Norovirus can strike at any time. Don't wait until an outbreak occurs to arm yourself and your staff with knowledge! For more information about Norovirus, visit:

http://www.cdc.gov/Features/Norovirus/

http://www.cdphe.state.co.us/dc/Epidemiology/Norovirus%20guidelines2006.pdf

http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/norovirus/DS00942

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norovirus



Secure Environment

As the weather improves and the days get warmer and longer, the urge to go outside affects us all, including those individuals who have dementia. Please take the time to review your facility's secure environment to ensure residents remain safe. You can also review the Frequently Asked Questions on our website for secure environment requirements. Also, consider offering safe options to allow residents time outside.

Residents' Rights Posters

The Department's residents' rights posters have been updated to incorporate the rule changes that occurred in 2010. We are currently in the process of delivering the posters to the local ombudsmen who have graciously volunteered to deliver the posters during their quarterly visits. If your facility does not receive visits from the ombudsman for the elderly, please contact us so that we can get an updated poster to your facility. If your facility has multiple buildings, remember to place a poster in each one.

Online Classes

Please visit our website to take our online classes. When you take a class, you'll be able to enter your name and print off a certificate that will give you 2 hours of credit. We recently added three new classes to the website: Food Safety in Assisted Living, Documentation in Assisted Living, and Resident Rights in Assisted Living. If the classes are not working properly or the certificates are not printing appropriately, please contact us so that we can correct any issues in a timely manner.

Reminder...

Don't forget to visit www.assistedliving.dhw.idaho.gov to sign up to receive email notifications when we update our Web pages or post new information.