

Widespread norovirus circulating in Colorado

Written by Holyoke Enterprise
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The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment is reporting widespread gastrointestinal illness (norovirus) throughout Colorado, including in nursing homes, assisted living facilities, schools and child care centers. Everyone is encouraged to increase simple prevention measures to stop further spread of illness in the community. Symptoms of the illness include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea and stomach cramping.

Alicia Cronquist, epidemiologist at the department, said, "We believe the illness is being caused by a virus germ called norovirus. This infection is very common this time of year. Symptoms usually last about one to three days and can cause dehydration, which can be dangerous for children and for elderly people."

Stomach illness is easily spread to others by direct contact with an ill person, touching contaminated surfaces or objects and then placing their hand in their mouth, or eating food that might have been contaminated by an ill person. This is especially a concern in group settings such as nursing homes and in child care settings where there are young children in diapers, and children play together and share toys.

In order to reduce the spread of illness, the department has recommended any child with stomach illness be kept home, that school or child care facility staff members encourage frequent hand washing and careful cleaning of the facility and that family members who are ill delay visiting relatives in nursing homes or assisted living facilities until two days after illness has passed. Health care workers who become ill with vomiting or diarrhea should stay home from work until 48 hours after symptoms have stopped.

Keep the family well by:

—keeping child(ren) home from school or child care for at least 48 hours after symptoms have stopped.

—not preparing food for others if one is ill and until 48 hours after symptoms have stopped.

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—washing hands frequently, especially after using the bathroom or changing diapers and before preparing or eating food or touching mouth.

—helping a child learn how to properly wash hands.

—not sharing food or drinks with other people while sick or if others have been sick.

—flushing vomit or putting it in a toilet or trashcan and making sure the surrounding area is kept clean and disinfected.

—immediately cleaning any surfaces near where someone has vomited or had diarrhea and disinfecting the surfaces using a solution of one part bleach to nine parts water.

—immediately removing and washing any clothing or linens soiled by vomit or diarrhea.

Norovirus can cause extended outbreaks in health care facilities, schools and child care facilities due to its infectious nature and consistent and prolonged close contact among students or residents.

Cronquist said, “Everyone can help prevent spread of stomach illness by staying home when you are ill and keeping your kids home until 48 hours after their symptoms have stopped. If you become ill it is important not to prepare food for other people until 48 hours after your symptoms have stopped. Also, consider delaying visits to seniors in nursing homes and assisted living facilities until you are better.”

Information on norovirus, including frequently asked questions, can be found at www.cdc.gov/norovirus

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