



Philadelphia Department of Public Health
Division of Disease Control

DONALD F. SCHWARZ, MD, MPH
Deputy Mayor, Health & Opportunity
Health Commissioner

NAN FEYLER, JD, MPH
Chief of Staff

CAROLINE C. JOHNSON, MD
Director, Division of Disease Control

Health Advisory
Norovirus Circulating in Philadelphia
December 22, 2008

The Division of Disease Control (DDC), Philadelphia Department of Public Health is currently investigating outbreaks of norovirus infection in four long-term care facilities in Philadelphia. In addition, visits to city Emergency Departments for gastrointestinal complaints have been elevated in recent weeks, and DDC has received reports of sporadic cases and clusters of suspected norovirus infection. Noroviruses are a leading cause of viral gastroenteritis in the community, especially in winter months. They are highly contagious, easily transmitted within closed facilities or institutions, and have significant implications for public health, particularly when young children, healthcare workers or foodhandlers are affected. Transmission occurs from person-to-person via fecal-oral spread, or through ingestion of contaminated food. DDC recommends the following to control the spread of norovirus:

- Persons with unexplained vomiting or diarrhea should be advised to stay home from work, school or childcare until they are completely well, especially if they work in high-risk situations like foodservice, healthcare, or childcare. Persons with suspected norovirus infection who work in these settings should remain excluded for at least 48 hours after symptoms have resolved.
- Hand washing and facility cleaning are critical for the control of this infection. Advise patients and household contacts of ill persons to clean hands before eating or drinking, after using the bathroom or changing diapers, and after contact with ill persons. Hand washing should be reinforced in all high-risk settings with young children, especially residential shelters and childcare programs, where children should be supervised to ensure that they wash hands after using the toilet and before eating.
- Shared bathrooms should be cleaned often with a bleach-based solution, especially frequently touched surfaces such as toilets and fixtures. Norovirus is highly resistant to many disinfectants such as quaternary ammonium or alcohols. Grossly contaminated surfaces should be cleaned first with a detergent to remove particulate debris, and then disinfected with a bleach solution.
- Healthcare facilities, childcare centers, and residential facilities should discourage visitors who are ill from visiting until they are completely well. Facilities should post signage to ensure that potential visitors understand this policy. Sample signs are available for download from <https://hip.phila.gov>, Disease Info, Norovirus.
- Stool samples should also be collected for persons who present with diarrhea as part of an outbreak or cluster of cases, particularly if involving an institution or facility. Norovirus detection assays are currently limited to public health laboratories and a few academic health centers. DDC can assist with submission of specimens to the Pennsylvania Department of Health Bureau of Laboratories for norovirus detection during outbreaks.
- Report any cluster or outbreak of gastrointestinal illness to DDC. Individual cases of norovirus infection are not reportable, however DDC should be notified of outbreaks of related cases, particularly those that are facility-associated, or possibly food-borne.

DDC has developed guidance to assist with the control of norovirus in institutional settings. For additional information or to report an outbreak, call 215-685-6740. After normal business hours, call 215-686-1776 and request to speak with on-call person for PDPH Division of Disease Control. This advisory and additional guidance is available from the PDPH Health Information Portal, at <https://hip.phila.gov>.