

Health Unit Media Release

Date: December 4, 2008



PREVENTION IS THE KEY TO REDUCING THE SPREAD OF NOROVIRUS

As we move forward into the winter season, we may begin to see an increase in the number of people in our community experiencing episodes of vomiting and diarrhea. An increase in this type of illness is not unusual in the fall and winter months and is generally suspected to be caused by a virus such as a Norwalk-like virus.

Norovirus is a major cause of gastroenteritis in children and adults. These viruses have been known to cause outbreaks in nursing homes, hospitals, schools, day care centres, businesses, and food premises. The virus appears with one or more of the following symptoms: nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal cramps, headache, chills, sore muscles, and a low-grade fever. While vomiting appears to be the main symptom in children, diarrhea is the main symptom in adults.

“An individual who no longer has the symptoms may still be carrying the virus,” says Dr. Anne Carter, Medical Officer of Health with the Leeds, Grenville and Lanark District Health Unit. “Anyone experiencing these symptoms should remain home for 48 hours after symptoms have stopped. Prevention is the key to reducing the spread of norovirus.”

Preventive Measures

1. Wash your hands before you eat and after going to the washroom.
2. Wash fruits and vegetables under warm, running water.
3. Shellfish such as clams and oysters need to be well cooked.
4. If you or your children are ill, stay at home until 48 hours after symptoms have resolved.

People can become infected with the virus by touching surfaces or items contaminated with Norovirus and then placing their hand in their mouth. Norovirus illness is spread in a number of different ways:

- Poor hand washing after using the washroom
- Through the air from infected articles such as clothing and bed linens
- Ill people spread the virus through vomiting
- Ill food handlers preparing foods that do not require cooking (e.g., sandwiches and salads)
- Eating uncooked shellfish (raw oysters) harvested from polluted waters
- Eating fruits and vegetables irrigated with contaminated water from streams and rivers

From the time a person is infected to the time they become ill can average between 18 to 48 hours. Symptoms can last anywhere from 12 hours to 60 hours. If the symptoms last more than 72 hours, call your physician.

There is no treatment, other than making sure ill people, especially infants and the elderly, do not get dehydrated. To prevent dehydration, it is important to drink small, frequent amounts of water and other fluids such as broth, weak tea, diluted fruit juice and diluted sports drinks. Foods that may be easy to eat include: crackers, toast, rice, bananas, applesauce, pasta, cooked carrots and boiled potatoes. Limit or stop eating foods that may make you feel worse such as milk, fatty foods, gassy vegetables (broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage), sugary foods, spicy foods and caffeinated beverages.

For more information, contact the Leeds, Grenville and Lanark District Health Unit at 1-800-660-5853 or 613-345-5685.

-30-

Contact: Jane Lyster, Director of Health Protection, 613-345-5685