

Health Unit Media Release

February 28, 2011



Prevention is the Key to Reducing the Spread of Norovirus

Recent hospital emergency room surveillance across the tri-county and surrounding regions indicates an increase in illness resembling Norovirus (previously called Norwalk virus) affecting many people in the region. In response to this increase, the Health Unit's message is simple:

- **wash your hands frequently to prevent getting ill**
- **if you are ill, stay home and remain there until you've been symptom-free for 48 hours.**

This virus is a major cause of gastroenteritis (commonly referred to as "stomach flu") in children and adults and can cause outbreaks in nursing homes, hospitals, schools, day care centres and food premises. The symptoms of Norovirus illness usually include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and some stomach cramping.

The Leeds, Grenville and Lanark District Health Unit is reminding residents to be cautious and to limit the spread of gastro-intestinal illnesses through good hygiene and staying home when sick. **While the symptoms usually do not last more than two or three days, a person can still pass the virus to others for up to 48 hours after symptoms have disappeared.**

How do people become infected with Noroviruses?

Noroviruses are found in the stool or vomit of infected people. People can become infected with the virus in several ways, including:

- eating food or drinking liquids that are contaminated with Norovirus;
- touching surfaces or objects contaminated with Norovirus, and then placing their hand in their mouth;
- having direct contact with another person who is infected and showing symptoms (for example, when caring for someone with illness, or sharing foods or eating utensils with someone who is ill).

How you can prevent the spread of the illness?

1. Practice good and frequent handwashing particularly before meal preparation and eating, as well as, after using the washroom. Wash hands vigorously with soap and water for at least 15 seconds, ensuring that all parts of the hands have been cleaned. Use an alcohol based hand sanitizer according to product directions if soap and water are not available.
2. Carefully disinfect inanimate objects like tabletops, phones, bathrooms etc. with which the ill person may have had contact.
3. If you get sick with Norovirus symptoms, stay home until you have been symptom-free for 48 hours. Don't visit patients in hospitals and long-term care facilities, and avoid social events and public places.
4. Be respectful of staff at institutions that may limit visitors during outbreaks; they are trying to protect your loved ones.

Note: Though commonly referred to as "stomach flu" illness caused by Norovirus or similar viruses should not be confused with *Influenza*, a mainly respiratory illness which can be prevented through vaccination. Presently there is no vaccine available for Norovirus.

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