



County of Santa Cruz



HEALTH SERVICES AGENCY

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PUBLIC HEALTH ADVISORY

To:	Santa Cruz County Healthcare Providers
From:	Lisa B. Hernandez, MD, MPH, County Health Officer
Subject:	Norovirus Outbreak in Santa Cruz County
Date:	February 9, 2024

Situational Update:

There is an ongoing outbreak of a gastrointestinal (GI) illness consistent with Norovirus at a congregate living facility in Santa Cruz County. Since January 23, there have been 34 reported cases with no known deaths or hospitalizations.

Noroviruses are a common cause of viral gastroenteritis outbreaks, and nearly two-thirds of these outbreaks occur in skilled nursing facilities. Due to the transmission of the virus through contact with surfaces contaminated by stool or vomit, close contact with an infected individual, or consumption of contaminated food or drinks, communities in close proximity are especially vulnerable, including residential communities, schools, and childcare centers. Most spread occurs through touching the mouth after contact with contaminated surfaces, but it can also occur through skin-to-skin contact or breathing airborne viral particles after an ill person vomits.

Noroviruses are extremely contagious, since high viral loads are present in both stool and vomit, and only a few viral particles are required to transmit illness. Symptoms usually last for 1 to 3 days and include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal pain, and occasionally fever. Even after symptoms resolve, individuals are still highly infectious especially for the first 48 hours, but sometimes for two weeks or more afterwards. Treatment is supportive with fluids.

ACTIONS REQUESTED OF HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS

Infection Prevention and Control:

- Practice frequent handwashing with soap and water. **Alcohol-based sanitizers are NOT effective against Norovirus.**
- ALWAYS wash hands with soap and water at these times:
 - Before and after contact with an ill or suspected ill individual
 - After using the toilet or assisting someone with toileting
 - Before AND after preparing food

- After touching potentially contaminated objects (e.g. doorknobs, counters, walkers)
- Use [Contact and Standard Precautions](#) when caring for ill or suspected ill individuals.
- Always use appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE):
 - Don a gown and gloves prior to entering the room of a symptomatic person and discard soiled PPE upon exiting the room. If there are multiple people sharing a room, change PPE between contact with each person.
 - Always wear gloves if there is any possibility of contact with bodily fluids. Assume all bodily fluids are contaminated.
 - Wear a mask and eye protection when in contact with visibly soiled surfaces, objects, or ill people.

Symptom Recognition and Education:

- Recognize Norovirus symptoms: abdominal cramping, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and fever.
- [Test](#) for Norovirus in individuals who are symptomatic.
- Report cases or outbreaks to the Communicable Disease Unit at: HSACD@santacruzcountyca.gov.
- Stay home if you personally experience these symptoms, and do not return to work until you have been symptom-free for 48 hours.

Environmental Cleaning and Disinfection:

- Clean and disinfect frequently (only a small amount of virus is needed to transmit disease).
- Use disinfectants [recommended](#) by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and follow the manufacturer’s instructions for use. In general, when preparing bleach solutions:
 - Use a 1:10 dilution for surfaces soiled by bodily fluids (1 part bleach: 10 parts water)
 - Use a 1:100 dilution for frequently contacted surfaces (1 part bleach: 100 parts water)
- Place soiled linens in a plastic bag before sending to the laundry.
- Wash soiled linen in hot water and dry at the hottest setting possible.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [About Norovirus](#). (CDC, 2023) | [Spanish version](#)
- [Norovirus Illness: Key Facts](#). (CDC, 2018)
- [Cleaning and Disinfecting with Bleach](#). (CDC, 2022) | [Spanish version](#)
- [EPA Products Effective Against Norovirus \(List G\)](#). (EPA, 2023)
- [Identify the Pathogen! Norovirus](#). (*Prevention Strategist*, APIC, 2017)
- [Norovirus Communications Toolkit](#). (CDPH, 2023)
- [Norovirus Fact Sheet](#). (CDPH, 2018)

Health Alert: conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention.

Health Advisory: provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.

Health Update: provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; unlikely to require immediate action.