

Viral Gastrointestinal Illness Outbreak Control Measures for Schools

Viral gastroenteritis is an infection caused by a variety of viruses that results in vomiting and diarrhea including norovirus, adenovirus and rotavirus. These viruses are easily spread through contaminated food and water or by touching contaminated surfaces and then touching your mouth. Fortunately, there are many simple interventions that can decrease the spread of these illnesses.

Following these outbreak control measures can help to stop the spread of viruses within the school setting:

Identifying and Managing Gastrointestinal Illnesses at School

- Educate students and staff on the signs, symptoms and ways to prevent gastrointestinal illnesses.
- Encourage staff, students and their parents to report symptoms when absent due to illness to prevent further spread.
- Consider communicating with staff, students and their parents about illness in the school.
- Discourage students from sharing food or drinks such as water bottles for sports teams.
- Notify parents as soon as an ill child is identified. The ill child should be promptly removed from contact with other children to another supervised location until the parent arrives; the child should not be sent home on the bus. Once they have left, this location would need thorough cleaning and disinfecting of all surfaces.

Any individual who has experienced diarrhea or vomiting should not return to school until they have been symptom free for at least 48 hours. If symptoms worsen, the individual must be advised to seek medical attention.

Strict Hand Hygiene

- Encourage frequent hand washing for students and staff.
- Provide easy access to hand sanitizer and hand washing stations.
- Hand washing with liquid soap and water for at least 15 seconds is the preferred method of hand hygiene in school, especially when hands are visibly soiled.
- Wash hands after using the washroom, touching potentially contaminated surfaces, play, and before and after preparing or eating food.

Enhanced Environmental Cleaning and Disinfection

- Increase frequency of cleaning and disinfection of common areas and high touch surfaces such as door knobs, faucet handles, computer keyboards, railings and desktops is recommended.
- Immediate cleaning and disinfection is required when there are spills or heavy/gross contamination of surfaces by vomit or diarrhea. Refer to the Halton fact sheet: *Schools: How to Clean up Vomit or Feces*.
- Check your disinfectant label to ensure that it claims to be effective against viruses such as norovirus and has a DIN (Drug Identification Number). Contact Halton Region Public Health if unsure about which disinfectant to use.

- Minimize the use of common or shared items. If shared use is necessary, clean and disinfect between uses.
- Increase the frequency of cleaning and disinfection of shared transportation.

Additional Outbreak Measures for Consideration

- Postpone special events, performances or celebrations that involve bringing in family members and visitors.
- Postpone high-risk field trips and activities including:
 - Assemblies
 - Overnight field trips
 - Crowded indoor venues
 - Visits involving vulnerable populations (such as congregate care, hospital)

Other measures may be recommended by Halton Region Public Health depending on the situation.