

Summary Sheet

Date: September 22, 2011

Subject: New press Release on Norovirus in Montana

NEWS

Summary:

Department of Public Health and Human Services www.dphhs.mt.gov

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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DPHHS reports several outbreaks of norovirus, provides prevention tips

The Montana Department of Health and Human Services (DPHHS) has recently received several reports of gastroenteritis outbreaks in schools, child day care settings and nursing homes. Since early September, several hundred people throughout the state have experienced vomiting, diarrhea, and nausea lasting 24 to 48 hours. In those outbreaks where laboratory testing was performed, norovirus was found to be the cause of the illnesses.

Noroviruses are the most common of the viruses that cause gastroenteritis. Sometimes the illness is called “food poisoning” or “stomach flu”, although this illness is not related to influenza viruses which cause respiratory illness. The usual symptoms of gastroenteritis include diarrhea, vomiting, nausea, and stomach pain. There is no specific treatment for this illness and most persons recover in 1 to 3 days. The illness can last longer and be more severe in young children, older persons, or persons who have other health conditions.

The virus is highly contagious and can spread rapidly. A person can become ill by ingesting the virus from contaminated food or water or by close contact with someone who is ill. Touching surfaces or objects that are contaminated with norovirus, and then transferring the virus hand to mouth is another common way of becoming infected.

“Norovirus can spread very quickly and can make some persons very ill,” said DPHHS Director Anna Whiting Sorrell. “To protect yourself and others it is important to wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water often, stay at home if you are ill with diarrhea, vomiting, or nausea, and never prepare food for others if you sick with any of these symptoms.”

Tips to prevent the spread of norovirus:

- **Practice proper hand hygiene:** Wash your hands carefully with soap and water, especially after using the bathroom or changing diapers and always before eating or preparing food.

Alcohol-based hand sanitizers (containing at least 62% ethanol) may be a helpful addition to hand washing, but they are not a substitute for washing with soap and water.

- **Take care in the kitchen:** Carefully wash fruits and vegetables, and cook oysters and other shellfish thoroughly before eating them.
- **Do not prepare food while ill:** People who are infected with norovirus should not prepare food for others while they have symptoms and for 3 days after they recover from their illness.
- **Clean and disinfect contaminated surfaces:** After an episode of illness, such as vomiting or diarrhea, immediately clean and disinfect contaminated surfaces by using a bleach-based household cleaner as directed on the product label or a solution made by adding 5–25 tablespoons of household bleach to 1 gallon of water.

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- **Wash laundry thoroughly:** Immediately remove and wash clothing or linens that may be contaminated with vomit or fecal matter. Handle soiled items carefully—without agitating them—to avoid spreading virus. They should be laundered with detergent at the maximum available cycle length and then machine dried.

More information is available on the CDC website: <http://www.cdc.gov/Features/Norovirus/> and <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/revb/gastro/norovirus.htm>