

INFORMATION SHEETS AND PAMPHLETS ON NOROVIRUS AND INFLUENZA

The following pages include handouts for tenants and visitors that provide information about norovirus (the usual cause of vomiting and diarrhea) and influenza. These pages can be copied as needed and provided to various groups for simple explanations, including the need for precautions and additional actions required when there is an increased incidence of illness.

Brochures are two sided. They are created so that they can be copied back-to-back and then triple-folded. When this is done, they read from left to right as expected.



What should I know about Norovirus?

Norovirus is sometimes incorrectly referred to as the **stomach flu**. It is a viral infection that affects the gastrointestinal tract.

The symptoms of Norovirus are:

- Vomiting
- Watery non-bloody diarrhea (2 or more stools beyond what is normal for that person within 24 hours)
- Abdominal cramps
- Nausea
- Occasionally fever

Although death is seldom associated with norovirus, dehydration is the major problem in the frail and the elderly. Tenants should be monitored by staff and family to ensure that they are receiving and able to keep down enough fluids. Occasionally ill people may need to be hospitalized for fluid replacement. It is very important that hospital staff know that the tenant may be infectious, or that the tenant was in contact with someone who was. Infections of norovirus are easily spread especially when diarrhea or vomit occurs close to other people.

What are noroviruses?

Noroviruses are a group of viruses that cause the “stomach flu,” or gastroenteritis (GAS-tro-enter-I-tis), in people. This virus was previously called **Norwalk**.

Gastroenteritis refers to an inflammation of the stomach and intestines.

Viruses are very different from bacteria and parasites. Viruses are much smaller than bacteria, are not affected by treatment with antibiotics, and cannot grow outside of a person’s body.

What are the symptoms caused by noroviruses?



The symptoms of norovirus usually include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and some stomach cramping. Occasionally people additionally have a low-grade fever, chills, headache, muscle aches, and a general sense of tiredness. The illness often begins suddenly, and the infected person may feel very sick. The illness is usually brief, with symptoms lasting only about 1 or 2 days. In general, children experience more vomiting than adults.

What is the name of the illness caused by noroviruses?

Illness caused by norovirus infection has several names, including:

- **stomach flu** – this “stomach flu” is **not** related influenza, which is a respiratory illness caused by influenza virus.

- **viral gastroenteritis** – the most common name for illness caused by norovirus.
- **food poisoning** (although there are other causes of food poisoning)

How serious is norovirus disease?

Norovirus disease is usually not serious, although people may feel very sick and vomit many times a day. Most people get better within 1 or 2 days, and they have no long-term health effects related to their illness. However, sometimes people are unable to drink enough liquids to replace fluids that they lost because of vomiting and diarrhea. These persons can become dehydrated and may need special medical attention. This problem with dehydration is usually only seen among the very young, the elderly, and persons with weakened immune systems. There is no evidence to suggest that an infected person can become a long-term carrier of norovirus.

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 to 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).

This virus is **very contagious** and can spread rapidly where there is shared accommodation such as in care homes.

When do symptoms appear?



Symptoms of norovirus illness usually begin about 24 to 48 hours after contact with the virus, or as early as 12 hours after exposure.

Are noroviruses contagious?

Noroviruses are **very contagious** and can spread easily from person to person. Both stool and vomit are infectious. Particular care should be taken when caring for tenants in adult briefs who may have diarrhea.

How long are people contagious?

People infected with norovirus are contagious from the moment they begin feeling ill to at least 2 days after recovery. Some people may be contagious for as long as 2 weeks after recovery.

Therefore, it is particularly important for people to use good hand washing and other hygienic practices after they have recently recovered from norovirus illness.



Who gets norovirus infection?

Anyone can become infected with these viruses. There are many different strains of norovirus, which makes it difficult for a person's body to develop long-lasting immunity. Norovirus illness can recur throughout a person's lifetime. In addition, because of personal differences in immunity, some people are more likely to become infected and develop more severe illness than others.

What treatment is available for people with norovirus infection?

Currently, there is no antiviral medication that works against norovirus and there is no vaccine to prevent infection. Norovirus infection cannot be treated with antibiotics. This is because antibiotics work to fight bacteria and not viruses. Norovirus illness is usually brief in healthy individuals.

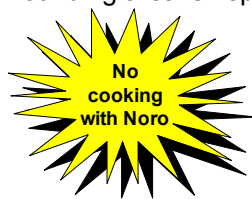
When people are ill with vomiting and diarrhea, they should drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration.

Dehydration among young children and the frail elderly can be common, and it is the most serious health effect that can result from norovirus infection. By drinking fluids such as juice, or water, people can reduce their chance of becoming dehydrated.

Can norovirus infections be prevented?

Yes. You can decrease your chance of coming in contact with norovirus by following these preventive steps:

- Frequently **wash your hands**, especially after toilet visits and changing diapers and before eating or preparing food.
- Carefully **wash fruits and vegetables**, and steam oysters before eating them.
- Thoroughly clean and then disinfect contaminated surfaces immediately after an episode of illness by using a chlorine bleach-based household cleaner.
- Immediately remove and wash clothing or linens that may be contaminated with virus after an episode of illness (use hot water and soap).
- Flush or discard any vomit and/or stool in the toilet and make sure that the surrounding area is kept clean.



Persons who are infected with norovirus should not prepare food while they have symptoms and for 3 days after they recover from their illness. Food that may have been contaminated by an ill person should be discarded.

Vancouver Island

Health Authority

Norovirus

“Stomach flu”



QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

For Assisted Living Tenants, Their Friends & Family

“Reminders” for People with Gastro Illness

- To prevent the spread of germs that cause vomiting and diarrhea, it is very important that you tell staff as soon as you feel sick.
- If someone is coming to visit you, and you know that they are unwell, please ask them to put off their visit until they are feeling better, and have had no vomiting or diarrhea for at least two days.
- People with vomiting or diarrhea (that may be infectious), will be encouraged to stay in their rooms while they are ill. Meals will be brought to the room. **Staying in your room away from others is the best way to prevent germs from spreading to other tenants and staff.**
- To help yourself and the other tenants, you need to wash your hands very well before meals and especially after using the toilet. Wash all of the skin on your hands (back and front), and keep your nails short and clean.
- If you are sick, and continue to feel poorly, you will be encouraged to contact your family physician for direction on what you should be doing.
- If your doctor requests tests, the staff may want you to give them a sample to send for testing. This will usually be bowel movement if you have diarrhea. They will assist you to get the sample into the container. Staff will need to clean the outside of the container if it has become soiled.
- Staff caring for you will want to know if you have had any accidents anywhere in the facility so they can clean the area quickly and thoroughly. Although this is embarrassing, it is best to remove the soilage quickly. If left in place, it could spread the infection to others.
- If you are unable to keep down fluids, and feel thirsty, you need to let staff know.
- Let staff know if you have any clothes that are soiled and need to be laundered.
- Staff may wear cover gowns and gloves, and sometimes even masks and eye glasses to protect them from getting your infection. Although they may look strange, they are still the same caring people. **It is important that they stay healthy so that they can help to assist you.**
- You may smell chlorine bleach or other strong cleaning agents, which will help to kill the germs especially around toilet areas.
- If you share your room, it is important to avoid close contact with your family members as much as possible to prevent them from becoming ill. Some suggestions are to maintain a distance from a person who is ill (arm’s length), wipe the seat of the toilet with a bleach solution before you use it, and wash your hands frequently.
- Once you are feeling well again and **have not had any vomiting or diarrhea for two to four days, you can safely socialize with others.** Be sure to shower or bath well and wear clean clothes. This will make you feel better and help to protect the other tenants.

Web Connects: Links for Norovirus Information

Norovirus General Information:

1. Viral Gastroenteritis (CDC)

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/revb/gastro/faq.htm>

2. Three page handout Questions & Answers (CDC)

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/revb/gastro/noro-ga.pdf>

3. Norovirus for Food Handlers

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/revb/gastro/noro-foodhandlers.pdf>

4. BCCDC One page Request to Public

http://www.bccdc.org/downloads/pdf/epid/reports/norovirus_release_feb_06.pdf

5. Health files with links

<http://www.bchealthguide.org/healthfiles/hfile87.stm#01234>

6. Health files information on Norovirus in many languages

<http://datafind.gov.bc.ca/hlthguide/query.html?qp=url%3Awww.bchealthguide.org%2Fhealthfiles%2F&qp2=&mi=hlthguide&refurl=&qs=&qc=&pw=100%25&ws=1&la=&qm=0&st=1&nh=10&lk=1&rf=0&oq=&rq=0&qt=norovirus>

Cough and Sneeze Etiquette

Respiratory illness is spread by contact with germs from infected people, or their belongings and surroundings. Recently, the Centre for Disease Control (CDC) has encouraged everyone to use cough and sneeze etiquette to assist in the prevention of chest infections and other illnesses.

There is an excellent short video demonstrating how health care workers and tenants can help to stop the spread of respiratory germs, as well as posters that support this action.

Visit: <http://www.coughsafe.com/> for more information, or go to <http://www.coughsafe.com/media.html> and click on the appropriate version of the video (depending on your type of computer).

Visitors who are unwell should not visit Assisted Living residences.

When would extra precautions be done?

When there are two or more cases of respiratory illness occurring together, it is possible that there will be more infections of influenza. When this occurs, the Assisted Living residence must use special measures to keep the other tenants and staff safe from infection. Unless the tenant is very ill or needs your special attention, or visitors have come from far away, it is wise to put off visiting until this illness has ended.

It is especially unwise to visit if influenza is present if you are elderly or have not received the “flu” shot.

Why do Tenants need anti-viral medication?

If a Tenant has just developed new symptoms of respiratory infection when Influenza has been diagnosed by the Lab, the tenant’s doctor may order **antiviral medication** to **treat** their infection.

What is the antiviral medication called?

New medications are always being produced, but antiviral drugs are not very common. There is one antiviral medication that is currently being used. It is called **oseltamivir** (also known as Tamiflu). Tenants given these medications must

have good kidney function. As some pills can interact with other medications tenants are receiving. It is important to ensure no changes in your health occur. Any Tenant who shows increasing confusion or vomiting should let staff know, in case it relates to one of these medications.

Is Influenza Dangerous?

Different strains of influenza can affect people in different ways. If you have had the current strain of flu before, or this particular strain was in the flu shot you received this year, you usually have some protection.

Flu can be very hard on ill and elderly people and can result in weakened lung function and even death. All tenants should be vaccinated every year against influenza and at least once in their life against the bacteria that causes pneumococcal infection. Ask your Doctor if you have had these vaccinations.

Vancouver Island Health Authority

Influenza

Respiratory Illness Information



QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

For Tenants, Their Friends & Families

What is Influenza?

Influenza or the “**real flu**” is a respiratory illness. Many people confuse this with “**stomach flu**” which is a different illness and **not influenza**. Influenza is caused by the influenza virus. This virus has many different strains. Some strains are more able to cause disease than other strains, and some are nastier, and can make people very ill.

How is Influenza Spread?

Influenza is spread by **droplets** when people cough or sneeze, sing or speak. These droplets contain the influenza virus, and spread to others by entering their nose or mouth. The virus is also spread on hands and clothing or equipment.

What are the signs of the flu?

When someone catches influenza from another person, they can be infectious without even knowing it until one or two days later. As the illness continues, they may develop some or all of the following symptoms:

- A **new** cough
- Fever
- Headache
- Aches and pains in muscles or joints
- Lack of energy and need to lie down and sleep (weakness or exhaustion)

Influenza can make people very ill and even cause death in some.

How Can We Prevent the Spread of Influenza?

The most effective method of preventing influenza is for people to have the influenza vaccination or “flu shot.”

The influenza vaccine is made from a “dead” virus and will not give you the flu, even though some people say that they feel slightly unwell following vaccination. As people get older, their response to the vaccine may be weaker, so it is very important that everyone who is in contact with older people gets the vaccination. This makes it less likely that the older person will come in contact with infectious people and get sick.



Other Ways of Preventing the spread of the Influenza Virus are:

1. Clothing & Face covers: staff will offer masks to visitors of tenants who have symptoms of the flu. Anyone providing care to an infectious influenza tenant may be provided with a cover gown and gloves. Masks and

eye protection are also helpful in preventing infection.

2. Hygiene: hand washing to all surfaces of your hands with a good rubbing friction is a very effective method of stopping the spread of the influenza virus.

3. Participation in Activities: Tenants who are possibly infectious should stay in their room for 5 days from when they got sick or until symptoms disappear.

If symptomatic tenants must leave their room, (or if share their room with a family member), they may wear a mask if they feel okay doing so. The mask is especially important when close to others. Infectious people should turn their head away and cough or sneeze into a tissue or their sleeve. If hands are used instead of a tissue, they must be washed immediately.



“Reminders” for People with Chest Infections

- To help to prevent the spread of germs that cause the flu (influenza), it is very important that you tell the staff as soon as you feel hot, start to cough, have muscle aches or feel more tired than usual.
- If someone is coming to visit you, and you know that they are unwell, please ask them to put off their visit until they are feeling better, and have had no cough or fever for at least five days.
- Having a “flu shot” is the best way to prevent catching the flu from someone else.
- People with the flu are infectious, and they will be encouraged to stay in their rooms while they are sick. Meals will be brought to their rooms. **Staying in your room when you are ill is the best way to stop the spread of germs to the other tenants and staff.**
- To help yourself and the other tenants, you need to wash your hands very well before meals, after using the toilet, and after coughing or handling used tissues. Wash all of the skin on your hands (back and front), and keep your nails short and clean.
- When you feel a cough or sneeze coming, turn your head away from others. If no tissue is handy, cough or sneeze into your sleeve. The material your sleeve is made from will hold the germs and prevent them from spreading as much. Be sure to wash your hands after you cough or sneeze.
- Use paper tissues (like Kleenex) instead of cloth hankies. Use the tissue once and then discard it. Remember to wash your hands after you have blown your nose.

- If you are unable to keep down fluids, and feel very thirsty, or are hot and possibly have a fever, you need to tell staff. Sometimes after the flu, the cough gets worse. If this happens, contact your doctor if you are able or ask the staff or your family to let your doctor know.
- If your doctor requests tests, the staff may want you to give them a sample to send for testing. The test consists of a swab rubbed on the inner part of your nostrils. It may seem unpleasant, but if you relax, staff can get the best sample, and it won't take long.
- Your doctor may also determine that you require medications (anti-virals) for this infection.
- Staff may wear cover gowns and gloves, and even masks and eye glasses to keep them from getting your infection. **It is important that they stay healthy so that they can help to assist you.** Although they may look strange, they are still the same caring people.
- If you share your room with your spouse, it is important to avoid close contact with him or her as much as possible to prevent them from becoming ill. Some suggestions are to maintain a distance (arm's length), always turn away from them and cover your mouth when coughing, and wash your hands frequently.
- Once you are feeling better and have not had the cough, fever, or sick feeling (usually it takes about **five days**), you can leave your room and rejoin group activities.

Web Connects: Links for Influenza Information

Influenza General Information:

1. Public Health Agency: What is flu?

http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/influenza/influenza-undrstnd_e.html

2. WHO Handbook for Journalists Information about Influenza Pandemic (contains good general info also)

http://www.who.int/csr/don/Handbook_influenza_pandemic_dec05.pdf

3. Questions & Answers about the Flu (CDC)

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/qa/>

4. Key Facts about Influenza and Influenza Vaccine (CDC)

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/keyfacts.htm>

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/pdf/keyfacts.pdf>

5. Canadian Centre for Occupation Health and Safety: General Influenza Info.

http://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/biol_hazards/influenza.html

6. Symptoms and What to do if you get Influenza (CDC)

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/symptoms.htm>

7. WHO Influenza Fact Sheet

<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs211/en/print.html>

8. BC Health Files Multiple Influenza topics

<http://www.bchealthguide.org/healthfiles/hfile12a.stm>

and

<http://datafind.gov.bc.ca/hlthguide/query.html?qp=url%3Awww.bchealthguide.org%2Fhealthfiles%2F&qp2=&mi=hlthguide&refurl=&qs=&qc=&pw=100%25&ws=1&la=&qm=0&st=1&nh=10&lk=1&rf=0&oq=&rq=0&qt=influenza>

9. CDC Ways to Prevent Influenza

<http://www.cdc.gov/print.do?url=http://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/preventing.htm>

10. Good Health Habits for Preventing the Flu (CDC)

<http://www.cdc.gov/print.do?url=http://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/habits.htm>

11. Cover your Cough (CDC)

<http://www.cdc.gov/print.do?url=http://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/covercough.htm>

12. Stop the Spread of Germs (CDC)

http://www.cdc.gov/germstopper/materials/home_work_school.pdf

13. Stop the Spread of Germs - Free poster downloads (CDC)
<http://www.cdc.gov/germstopper/materials.htm>

14. Multiple links to General Information on this page (CDC)
<http://www.cdc.gov/germstopper/resources.htm>