



NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE
Thomas Farley, M.D., M.P.H.
Commissioner

To: Assisted Living Facilities in NYC

From: Sharon Balter, MD
Bureau of Communicable Disease
New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

RE: Norovirus outbreaks

Date: December 20, 2012

The New York City Department of Mental Health and Hygiene (DOHMH) would like to remind you that it is norovirus season and shelters and assisted living facilities in NYC are beginning to report outbreaks. While the duration of illness is usually short, noroviruses spread rapidly in settings such as shelters and assisted living facilities. The primary symptoms are vomiting and diarrhea, and noroviral infections can be much more severe in the elderly, sometimes requiring hospitalization and rarely can even be fatal. There is no need for antibiotic treatment (as antibiotics are not effective against viruses), and ill residents should be encouraged to drink fluids, especially if they have frequent vomiting or diarrhea. The symptoms characteristically last 24-48 hours. More information about norovirus can be found at <http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/cd/cdnor.shtml>

If more than one resident in your facility has symptoms of norovirus, you should call the NYC Department of Health as soon as possible for assistance at the number below. As norovirus is highly transmissible, we recommend the following control measures to be implemented immediately to help minimize further transmission:

1. Staff and Resident Education: All staff and residents should be alerted to the occurrence of a gastrointestinal outbreak at the facility and the importance of strict adherence to hand hygiene measures at all times (before and after eating, before and after toileting, and for staff, before and after any patient care activities). We recommend conducting special in-services for staff and patients on hand hygiene. For staff, they should adhere to standard and contact precautions, including wearing a mask and gloves when handling vomitus.
2. Hand Hygiene Supplies: Ensure that there are sufficient supplies of alcohol-based hand hygiene products, soap and paper towels in all communal bathrooms and other key areas (dining room, recreation room, etc).
3. Isolation of Ill Residents: Restrict symptomatic residents to their apartments as much as possible without compromising patient care. Ill residents should be isolated until

at least 48 hours after their symptoms end. Staff caring for these residents should use contact precautions for symptomatic patients who are incontinent of stool.

4. Patient Activities: Temporarily discontinue group activities, including communal dining until at least 72 hours after the onset of the last case.
5. New Admissions: Do not allow any new residents into the facility until at least 72 hours after the onset of the last case.
6. Symptomatic Staff: Survey all staff and food handlers for gastrointestinal symptoms and, if symptomatic, exclude from work until symptoms resolve.
7. Do Not Float Staff: Even well staff should not be floated during the outbreak as they may be incubating the illness.
8. Environmental Measures: Viral gastrointestinal agents, such as norovirus, are hardy and can persist in the environment; clean thoroughly any areas that may have become contaminated. Disinfect contaminated surfaces with a chlorine bleach solution with a concentration of 1,000-5,000 parts per million (5-25 tablespoons household bleach [5.25%] per gallon of water). Reinforce frequent and thorough cleaning throughout the facility, especially areas that are frequently touched (e.g., elevators, handrails, doorknobs, etc). When cleaning-up vomitus, staff should wear masks and gloves and use paper towels (not a reusable mop).
9. Visitors: Instruct visitors on appropriate hand hygiene and monitor compliance with contact isolation precautions. Consider posting a sign at the facility entrance to request that ill visitors not enter the facility or visit residents.
10. Specimen Collection: Try to send three to four stool specimens to a private lab for bacterial pathogen testing and for norovirus (if the lab that you use offers such testing).

We will check in daily to ensure that the outbreak is coming under control and to determine when these measures can be safely lifted. Please do not hesitate to contact us at the Bureau of Communicable Disease if there are any questions:

During business hours, call the Bureau of Communicable Disease:	347-396-2600
After hours, call the Poison Control Center:	212-764-7667