

本署檔號 Our Ref. : (54) in DH/SEB/CD/8/39/1  
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9 January 2008

Dear Principal / Person-in-charge,

### **Recent increase in noroviral gastroenteritis**

Winter is the peak season for norovirus activity. There were 15 institutional outbreaks caused by norovirus reported to Centre of Health Protection affecting 167 persons in December 2007, as compared with 5 outbreaks affecting 44 persons in November 2007. In the first 7 day of 2008, 6 outbreaks of norovirus were reported, all occurring in elderly homes affecting 48 persons. In addition, our sentinel surveillance based at elderly homes also showed recent elevated activity of acute diarrhoea and vomiting. To this end, I would like to bring to your attention to the prevention of viral gastroenteritis in your institution / organisation.

Viral gastroenteritis, commonly caused by noroviruses, is a frequent cause of outbreaks in institutions. Norovirus infection is usually mild and self-limiting yet they may result in outbreaks that are difficult to control. Symptoms include nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, abdominal pain, fever and malaise. The infection can spread through the consumption of contaminated food or direct contact with the vomitus or excreta of infected persons. Norovirus outbreaks may occur throughout the year but are known to occur more frequently in winter months (December to February).

To prevent outbreaks of acute gastroenteritis, strict personal, food and environmental hygiene with particular attention to handling of vomitus and faecal matter are very important. I would recommend you taking the following steps:

1. Remind children/students and staff to maintain personal hygiene practices especially proper hand-washing using liquid soap before meals and after going to toilet.
2. Remind children/students and staff and their family to maintain proper food hygiene. Ensure all food is adequately cooked especially high risk food like shellfish.



3. Train staff on the proper management and disinfection of the environment after vomiting incidents:
  - ◆ Keep children/students away from the area during the cleaning process;
  - ◆ Wear gloves and mask while cleaning the vomitus;
  - ◆ Use disposable towels (do not use floor mops) to wipe away all the vomitus from outside inward, before applying diluted bleach 1:49 to the surface and neighbouring area (say within two metres of the vomitus);
  - ◆ Leave for about 15 to 30 minutes to allow the bleach to inactivate viruses in the vomitus before rinsing the surface with water, and then leave it until dry;
  - ◆ Wash hands thoroughly afterwards;
  - ◆ Maintain good indoor ventilation.
  
4. Advise staff/students/children developing vomiting or diarrhoea to refrain from work/school and seek medical advice.

As schools, daycare and residential institutions are at risk of communicable disease outbreak, I would urge you to keep vigilance against communicable diseases. The ***“Guideline on Prevention of Communicable Diseases in Child Care Centres, Kindergartens and Schools”*** contains practical information and control measures on prevention of communicable diseases and is available at <http://www.chp.gov.hk/files/pdf/Guild-Booklet-eng.pdf>. If you notice an increase in number of students with symptoms of viral gastroenteritis, other infectious diseases or absentees, please inform the Central Notification Office of CHP as early as possible at Fax: 2477 2770 or Tel: 2477 2772 so that investigation and intervention can be initiated as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely,



(Dr SK CHUANG)

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