

Controlling the Spread of Norovirus in Schools and Child Care Settings

Outbreaks of norovirus infection are more likely to occur during winter months, but can happen at any time of the year. They are frequently seen in institutions such as residential facilities, hospitals, long-term care facilities, schools and child care settings. The virus is easily spread from person-to-person through direct contact, contact with contaminated surfaces and ingestion of contaminated food.

Suspected outbreaks should be reported to the Palm Beach County Health Department Division of Epidemiology at 561-671-4184.

Norovirus Characteristics

The typical symptoms of norovirus are nausea, vomiting, low-grade fever, abdominal cramps and watery, non-bloody diarrhea. Symptoms usually develop within 24 to 48 hours after exposure, but can appear as early as 12 hours. Illness typically lasts 12 to 60 hours and usually resolves on its own.

Norovirus is spread very easily from person to person. People can become infected with the virus in several ways, including:

- Eating or drinking contaminated food or liquids.
- Touching contaminated surfaces and then eating or touching their mouth.
- Caring for someone with the illness or sharing food or eating utensils with them.

Diagnosis and Treatment

Individuals with diarrhea should drink plenty of liquids and follow the infection control measures to prevent spread. Children or staff with vomiting and/or diarrhea should not attend school or child care for 48 hours after their symptoms have ended, or 72 hours for food handlers. There is no specific vaccine or therapy for norovirus. Treatment is supportive and focuses on preventing dehydration. If symptoms do not improve, individuals should contact their primary care physician.

Infection Control

- Hands should be washed vigorously with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds after toilet visits, diaper changing, handling soiled items, cleaning up diarrhea or vomit, and before food preparation, serving food, eating or feeding children.
- Younger children should be observed washing hands after using the toilet and before eating.
- Alcohol based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol can be used but is not as effective as soap and water.
- Education should focus on teaching children good hand hygiene.