

# Outbreaks of gastrointestinal illness in care settings

## Do two or more cases have the following symptoms?

Sudden onset of diarrhoea (non-bloody, watery) and/or vomiting

### Also present may be:

- abdominal cramps
- muscle aches
- headache
- feeling of weakness
- raised temperature
- feeling sick (nausea)

If you notice two or more cases in your care setting with these symptoms within two days of each other, not due to another reason (ie use of laxatives or other medication) then, **it could be an outbreak.**

Contact the Infection Prevention & Control Service (IPCS) on **0151 604 7750** (9am - 5pm Mon to Fri) or UKHSA out of hours on **0151 434 4819**, implement the control measures below, monitor the situation, allocate outbreak co-ordinator and ensure early stool samples are taken and that stool charts are in use.

## The IPCS will:

- support the home to assess the symptoms of the cases
- declare an outbreak (if appropriate)
- work with the care setting staff to support management of the outbreak
- advise on control measures

## Infection Prevention and Control Measures

**A short film shows how the environment becomes contaminated when an individual infected with norovirus projectile vomits.**

<https://www.hsl.gov.uk/resources/case-studies/vomiting-larry-visualising-contamination>

NB. 30mls of vomit may contain up to 30 million virus particles.

### Separating cases with symptoms from those without symptoms.

- ask cases who have symptoms to stay in their room, with the door kept closed if safe to do so
- discourage cases with symptoms from using shared areas
- inform cases and relatives of the situation, precautions, restrictions and risks
- assign staff to care for either cases with symptoms or those without.
- ensure non-urgent hospital visits are rearranged
- if a case needs to be admitted to hospital, please notify the admitting hospital and ambulance crew in advance

### Hand Hygiene and PPE

- wash hands thoroughly using liquid soap and water before and after contact with cases in line with WHO 5 moments of hand hygiene
- do not use alcohol gel during outbreaks as it does not kill gastrointestinal bugs
- staff should wear single-use, disposable plastic aprons and gloves when caring for symptomatic cases, for cleaning/

disinfecting the environment, and for cleaning/disinfection of body fluid spillages eg vomit, diarrhoea. Consider eye protection if there is a risk of splash or spray

- provide facilities for cases to wash their hands after using the toilet and before eating

### Cleaning and waste disposal

- de-clutter the environment and dispose of any exposed food
- clean and disinfect all frequently touched surfaces (eg toilet flush, door handles, light switches etc) at least twice daily using warm water and detergent and then disinfect using a chlorine releasing product diluted to 1,000ppm available chlorine, or a combined detergent/disinfectant product
- clean and disinfect as outlined above, any body fluids spills (eg vomit)
- clean and disinfect as outlined above, communal equipment thoroughly between use
- provide cases-dedicated equipment wherever possible

Also:

- if concerned about any individual, seek medical advice
- non-essential care by visiting healthcare staff must be deferred until after the outbreak.
- staff with symptoms should remain off work until they have been clear of symptoms for 48 hours
- inform all visitors to the home and display a poster at the entrance of the home
- ensure cases are well hydrated and if they deteriorate discuss with GP/clinician for review

Adapted from Health Protection  
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