



2<sup>nd</sup> December 2015

To: All schools

Dear colleagues,

### Norovirus season 2015/16

We are writing to update you that norovirus is now circulating in the community. Some schools, hospitals, and nurseries may have already been affected but there are steps you can take to minimise the risk of outbreaks in your establishment.

Norovirus causes viral gastroenteritis, which is characterised by the sudden onset of vomiting and/or diarrhoea, it can spread rapidly in closed environments such as schools, childcare settings, hospitals and nursing homes. However, most people do not require treatment and recover at home within one or two days.

Norovirus is easily transmitted from person to person and by consuming contaminated food or water or by contact with contaminated surfaces or objects. Soap and water should be readily available.

If someone in your establishment develops symptoms of norovirus, please help avoid spread by following this advice.

### Children and staff with symptoms of norovirus should:

- Stay away from work or school until they have been **free of symptoms for at least 48 hours** and avoid contact with others where possible.
- Keep hydrated by drinking fluids as tolerated
- If symptoms persist (more than 48 hours), phone the GP or the NHS non-emergency number 111 for advice.
- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water regularly but particularly after toilet visits and before eating and handling food. **Alcohol hand gel is not effective against norovirus**
- Do not visit friends or relatives in hospital or residential care homes as there is a real risk of introducing the infection to the establishment
- Do not handle or prepare food for other people until symptom free for at least 48 hours.
- Exclude ill children and staff from school trips and residential trips, consider postponing during an outbreak.

### Environmental decontamination

- Clean then disinfect frequent contact surfaces such as toilets at least daily and when contaminated, using a chlorine-releasing product that is active against viruses e.g. sodium hypochlorite, such as Milton, 0.1% solution or 1000ppm available chlorine
- Increase frequency of environmental decontamination during outbreaks
- Wash soiled clothing and fabrics on the hottest wash the material will withstand

## Reporting outbreaks and clusters

If you suspect an outbreak of diarrhoea and vomiting or notice an increase in the number of cases being reported please do not hesitate to call your local Public Health England Centre on Tel: 0300 303 8162 (option 2 then option 1).

Please find attached a letter template that you may want to consider for parents, guardians and carers as well as staff members if you have norovirus in your establishment.

If you have any queries about this letter please contact your PHE Centre. Your support in helping to avoid further spread in the community by promoting the following advice would be greatly appreciated.

Thank you for your co-operation.

Yours sincerely,



Trudi Grant  
Director of Public Health



Sarah Harrison  
Public Health England  
Deputy Director of Health Protection

## **SUGGESTED SCHOOL/NURSERY LETTER**

**To: All parents and staff**

Dear

I am writing to let you know that a number of children have recently been absent from school with suspected norovirus, a common infection which causes symptoms of diarrhoea and vomiting.

I have taken advice from Public Health England and they have offered the following advice:

- Norovirus is generally a mild infection and people usually recover fully within 2-3 days. No specific treatment is needed, but it is important to keep hydrated by drinking fluids as tolerated.
- Norovirus is highly infectious and spreads easily from person to person, especially in close knit communities such as schools, therefore, we are asking for your help to prevent further illness within the school by following the advice in the checklist below:
- Staff and pupils/children who develop symptoms of diarrhoea and/or vomiting should stay away from school/nursery and other childcare settings such as childminders until they have been symptom free for at least 48 hours.
- Good hygiene is important to stop the spread of infection, especially hand washing, frequently and thoroughly with soap and water, particularly after using the toilet and before eating or handling food.
- Good hygiene in the home will also help prevent spread to other family members. If possible separate toilets and towels should be used. Toilets, including seats and handles, as well as door handles, wash basins and other frequently touched surfaces should be cleaned and disinfected frequently.
- If symptoms do not resolve after 48 hours or if you are concerned please contact your GP by phone or contact the NHS non-emergency number 111.

We would like to thank you for your help with this. I have included a norovirus factsheet which you may also find useful and these are also available from the school office.

Yours sincerely