

**IN THIS ISSUE: Increased Norovirus Activity in Washoe County**

**INCREASED NOROVIRUS ACTIVITY IN WASHOE COUNTY**

**Introduction**

Norovirus is a virus that is the most common cause of acute gastroenteritis (diarrhea and vomiting). It is also known as the “stomach flu.” On average 19-21 million people become sick with norovirus each year in the United States. The most common signs and symptoms include vomiting, watery, non-bloody diarrhea, nausea, and abdominal cramps. Other signs and symptoms can include headache, body aches, and low grade fever. People usually become sick within 12-48 hours of their exposure to norovirus. Illness is typically self-limiting and lasts 1-3 days.

Norovirus is found in the stool and vomit of infected people and has to be swallowed to cause illness. It is highly contagious. It only takes as few as eighteen viral particles to make someone sick. A pea-sized piece of feces may contain billions of viral particles. Norovirus can be found in stool even before someone feels sick and remain in stool for as long as 2-3 weeks after people feel better. Noroviruses can remain infectious on environmental surfaces for many days and are relatively resistant to disinfection, heat, and cold.

**Current Norovirus Activity in Washoe County**

From late November through December, a total of three (3) outbreaks of confirmed norovirus have been reported to WCHD. One outbreak occurred in a school setting, one occurred in a casino/resort and another occurred in a healthcare facility. Over 250 people were reported with symptoms consistent with norovirus between these three outbreaks. Incidence in the population cannot be measured because individual cases of norovirus are not reportable to the Washoe County Health District (WCHD), only those cases associated with an outbreak are considered reportable. To date, norovirus GI and norovirus GII have both been identified as the laboratory-confirmed etiological agent causing these outbreaks.

In addition to the three latest outbreaks, there have been seven (7) other reported outbreaks during 2019 in Washoe County where norovirus was confirmed or suspected to be the etiological agent.

**2018 Outbreaks in Washoe County**

In 2018 a total of eighteen (18) norovirus outbreaks were reported to WCHD. Of the eighteen (18) total viral gastroenteritis outbreaks reported, 61% (11/18) occurred in a school setting 33% (6/18) occurred in a childcare setting and there was one (1) outbreak (<1% -1/18) at an adult assisted living facility. The median number of reported ill

persons per outbreak was 21 (range: 6 - 186 reported ill persons per outbreak). A total of 533 persons were reported as ill of which 530 met the case definition. Less than 1% (n=1) was confirmed by laboratory testing. Of the 533 reported ill persons, 67% (n=358) were associated with a school setting, 27% (n=144) were associated with a childcare setting and 6% (n=31) were associated with an adult assisted living facility. The transmission modes were primarily person-to-person.

**Reporting**

Individual or sporadic cases of norovirus are not reportable in Nevada. However, if an outbreak of norovirus is suspected or confirmed, then those illnesses are reportable under Nevada law. **Report suspected or confirmed outbreaks IMMEDIATELY to the Washoe County Health District at 775-328-2447.**

**If you are reporting an outbreak in a long-term care facility or another facility that is licensed by the state, please call the Nevada Department of Health and Human Services, Confidential Disease Reporting line at 775-684-5911.**

**Educate**

Education is critical for prevention. WCHD highly recommends that healthcare providers DO assist by providing the following messages to their patients. To protect themselves from norovirus patients should do the following:

- Wash hands for 20 seconds with soap and water, especially after using the toilet or changing diapers and before eating, preparing, or handling food. **Hand sanitizers are not as effective as soap and water against norovirus.**
- Wash fruits and vegetables before preparing and eating them.
- Cook oysters and other shellfish thoroughly before eating them.
- Do not prepare food or care for others while sick or during the two days after recovering from norovirus. In the presence of outbreaks, this length may extend to three days. It is important to note that during outbreaks, WCHD requests that child care facilities and schools exclude all ill students and employees with vomiting and/or diarrhea until 72 hours after symptoms stop. During that time period, a physician's note cannot be used as an exception to the exclusion requirement.

- Clean and disinfect contaminated surfaces after vomiting or having diarrhea. Noroviruses are relatively resistant to disinfection; therefore, if norovirus is suspected the contaminated surface should be cleaned with a freshly-made bleach solution using ½ cup of bleach plus one gallon of water (1000ppm). Another option is a disinfectant registered as effective against norovirus by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), [https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2018-04/documents/list\\_g\\_disinfectant\\_list\\_3\\_15\\_18.pdf](https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2018-04/documents/list_g_disinfectant_list_3_15_18.pdf)

- Wash clothes or other linens that may be contaminated with diarrhea or vomit. Wash the items with detergent at the maximum available cycle length and machine dry. Wear gloves while handling contaminated linens.

### **Correction**

Correction from Epi-News dated October 18, 2019:  
Varicella (chickenpox) is now a reportable condition.