
SUBJECT: Viral gastroenteritis

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To: Parents and Staff at Credit Meadows Elementary School

From: Control of Infectious Diseases Team, Public Health

There have been several cases of children ill with physician diagnosed Norovirus at Credit Meadows Elementary School

What is viral gastroenteritis?

Viral gastroenteritis is an infection that results in vomiting and/or diarrhea. There are several types of viruses that can cause these symptoms (the Norwalk virus is one of these viruses). The symptoms are usually a sudden onset of vomiting or diarrhea. Some people may experience headache, fever, and cramps. These symptoms can go away in as short as one day, but may last up to 10 days.

Is viral gastroenteritis serious?

Most people who get viral gastroenteritis recover with no long term effects. The very young or elderly may need treatment to correct or prevent dehydration.

Is this illness contagious?

The virus is spread from person to person by objects or hands contaminated by feces. This contamination can occur when infected people do not follow proper hand washing procedures after using the washroom. Outbreaks have affected large numbers of people on trains, cruise ships, in summer camps, and healthcare facilities.

Can viral gastroenteritis be treated?

The most important treatment for this illness is to maintain hydration. Some physicians may recommend oral rehydration solution for infants and young children. Antibiotics have no effect on viruses and anti-diarrheal medications may prolong the illness. There is no vaccine for this illness at this time.

What are signs of dehydration?

To avoid dehydration, it's important to drink water and other fluids. Signs of dehydration may include:

- Thirst
- Restlessness
- Dry mouth and tongue
- Dry skin
- Irritability
- Less frequent urination
- Sleepiness (hard to wake)
- Dry diaper for several hours

How can I prevent viral gastroenteritis?

Hand washing is the best prevention. Wash your hands thoroughly after contact with other people, frequently touched or contaminated surfaces or items, particularly articles contaminated with vomit or feces. Keep surfaces clean and disinfected, and promptly wash soiled articles of clothing. The virus can live on surfaces for days which make it easy to transmit within a household. It is not unusual for family members to become ill within hours of each other.

Follow these steps when washing hands:

1. Wet your hands with warm water.
2. Use soap.
3. Rub your hands and lather for at least 15 seconds.
4. Rinse with your fingertips pointing down so the lather goes towards the drain.
5. Dry hands thoroughly, pat the skin gently to avoid chapping and cracking.

Note: An alcohol-based hand sanitizer may be used in place of hand washing when hands are not visibly soiled and hand washing facilities are not available.

If my child gets sick, when can he or she return to school?

Keep your child at home for at least 24 hours after vomiting and diarrhea have stopped. If an outbreak is declared at the child care centre, exclusion may increase to 48 hours.

What are some ways to prevent other types of illness?

- Good hand washing is the single most effective way to prevent the spread of infection. Clean hands frequently with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub especially after coughing, sneezing, wiping a nose, using the washroom or changing a diaper and before eating and preparing food
- Cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze.
- Do not share food, drinks, toothbrushes, lip care products, cigarettes, musical instruments with mouthpieces, or eating utensils with others. Sports teams should not share water bottles or mouth guards
- If you have symptoms of illness avoid direct saliva contact with others (e.g., kissing).

For more information, refer to contact:

Name/Title: Control of Infectious Diseases Reporting Line

Contact: 519-822-2715 or 1-800-265-7293 ext. 4752 / www.wdgpUBLICHEALTH.ca