



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Suspected Cases of Norovirus on the Rise in Michigan

GRAND RAPIDS - Reports of stomach illness to the Michigan Department of Community Health have increased over the past week statewide. Some of the cases appear to be norovirus, a highly contagious illness that causes stomach cramps, nausea, diarrhea, and vomiting. The Kent County Health Department Communicable Disease staff members are monitoring emergency department visits, and note a slight increase in patients complaining of these symptoms recently.

"If you are suffering from stomach cramping, vomiting or diarrhea, avoid contact with those who do not have these symptoms," said Adam London, Health Officer of the Kent County Health Department. "We often see food preparation as a leading indicator of the spread of gastrointestinal illness. Avoid preparing food for others if you are ill." If you work in the food service industry, in a cafeteria, or in a restaurant, and you are ill, stay home until you recover. The Michigan Food Code requires food employees to be symptom-free from diarrhea or vomiting for a minimum of 24 hours before returning to work.

Norovirus is contained in the vomit and diarrhea of an infected individual. Although a surface may not be visibly soiled, the virus can still be present and can live on this surface for long periods of time if not properly cleaned. Because of this, if possible, infected individuals should use one bathroom while uninfected individuals use another. The infected person should use disposable paper towel to dry their hands after washing to prevent the virus from spreading. Be sure to clean that bathroom (and any other potentially contaminated areas) with a chlorine bleach solution, mixing ¼ cup of bleach with one gallon of water.

Other tips:

1. Wash your hands before eating, after using the bathroom, and before, during and after preparing food. Rub your hands together to lather the soap, and be sure to really scrub the backs of your hands, between your fingers, and under your nails:
 - Continue rubbing your hands for at least 20 seconds.
 - Rinse your hands well under running water.
 - Dry your hands using a paper towel or air dry them.
 - After drying, use another clean paper towel to open the door, and then dispose of it.
2. If you or your child suffer from vomiting or diarrhea, remain at home until symptoms are gone.
3. Don't prepare food for anyone else until you haven't had symptoms for 24 hours or more.
4. If sharing food, don't use bare hands when handling foods, and use utensils to transfer food from container to plate.

(more)

KCHD has been in the business of providing health services to Kent County since 1931. The Health Department is home to nearly 260 employees including public health nurses, sanitarians, health educators, technicians, public health administrators, and specialized staff at the Kent County Animal Shelter. The Health Department operates one main clinic and four satellite clinics located in Wyoming, Kentwood, Rockford, and Grand Rapids. To learn more about KCHD services, visit www.accesskent.com/health.

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There is no medication to treat norovirus. If you suspect you have it, drink plenty of water or sports drinks that do not contain caffeine. If you feel you are suffering from severe dehydration, contact a health care provider immediately. Symptoms can be worse in young children, the elderly, or in those with weakened immune systems. For more information, check out <http://www.cdc.gov/norovirus/>.

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