



North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services
Office of Public Affairs

2001 Mail Service Center • Raleigh, North Carolina 27699-2001
Tel 919-733-9190 • Fax 919-733-7447

Beverly Eaves Perdue, Governor

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Contact: Carol Schriber, DHHS Public Affairs Office, 919-733-9190

North Carolina experiencing more norovirus outbreaks; Public Health urges precautions

RALEIGH — The North Carolina Division of Public Health has received an increase in reports of norovirus outbreaks throughout the state dating back to late November 2008. Outbreaks have been associated with catering services, restaurants, day care centers, schools, hospitals and nursing homes.

The symptoms of norovirus illness usually include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and some stomach cramping, sometimes accompanied by a low fever, chills, headache or muscle aches.

Noroviruses are very easy to transmit, so Public Health experts are asking all North Carolinians to follow these simple rules:

- People ill with symptoms of vomiting or diarrhea should not attend day care, school, or work while they are sick.
- Always thoroughly wash your hands with soap and water after experiencing an episode of vomiting or diarrhea, or after helping anyone who is experiencing those symptoms. Hand sanitizer foams and gels are not effective against noroviruses.
- People who are ill with symptoms of vomiting or diarrhea should never prepare food for other people to eat.

"Although these kinds of illness outbreaks are common, the dehydration caused by the symptoms can become serious for children, elderly people, and people who are already dealing with poor health conditions," said State Epidemiologist Dr. Jeffrey Engel. "We need everyone's cooperation to limit the spread of these viruses in our communities right now," he said.

Viruses like norovirus are a common cause of outbreaks reported to public health authorities, causing approximately half of all the vomiting and diarrheal illness outbreaks reported to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention each year.

More information about preventing and controlling noroviruses is on the NC. Public Health website, www.ncpublichealth.com, and the CDC website, www.cdc.gov.

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