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BAY COUNTY
Health Department
Creating A Healthy Environment For The Community

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Norovirus Awareness

Now that we are approaching the holidays, the Bay County Health Department would like to inform you about a viral gastroenteritis illness known as *Norovirus*. Noroviruses are a group of viruses that cause acute gastroenteritis in humans. The symptoms of Norovirus infection include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, cramping, and low-grade fever. Noroviruses are transmitted through the fecal-oral route, either by consumption of fecally contaminated food or water, direct person-to-person spread, or environmental and fomite contamination.

The Health Department has recently investigated several cases of this possible illness and we are advising schools on steps to take to reduce the occurrence and spread of this illness. Norovirus is always present in our community. Norovirus spreads easily from person to person and is often responsible for large outbreaks. This is the same disease that occasionally makes the news after infecting passengers on cruise ships, and person to person spread is common in household settings.

Be sure to encourage frequent and thorough hand washing among both children and your school staff. **Staff and children must stay home if they become ill with vomiting or diarrhea for at least 48 hours after symptoms have stopped.** Excluding ill people from your facility will help prevent an outbreak.

In spite of your efforts, someone may become ill at your facility. **If a child vomits or has an episode of diarrhea that escapes from their clothes:**

- Isolate the child from other children
- Isolate all children from the vomit and diarrhea
- If a child vomits or has an episode of diarrhea in a classroom, move all the children out of the classroom until you have completed the clean up
- Put on disposable gloves, a mask and eye protection
- Clean and disinfect spills of vomit or stool on floors, toilets, countertops, doorknobs, faucets, sinks, and other surfaces using the following three step process:
 1. Clean up visible vomit with absorbent material and discard into a plastic bag
 2. **For non-porous surfaces, tile floors, counter-tops, sinks, toilets** - Disinfect the area using 1/3 cup of bleach in 1 gallon of water for hard surfaces and steam clean carpets (1:50 dilution)
For stainless steel, food/mouth contact items, toys - Disinfect using 1 tablespoon of bleach in 1 gallon water (1:250 dilution)
For porous surfaces, wood floors - Disinfect using 1 cup bleach plus 1/2 cup bleach in 1 gallon water (1:10 dilution)
 3. Liberally disinfect area and objects surrounding the contamination with an appropriate environmental disinfectant (multiple applications may be required)
- **Clean clothing and textiles using the following method:**
 1. Remove vomit or material from clothing
 2. Keep contaminated and uncontaminated clothing/textiles separated
 3. Wash items in pre-wash cycle then use the hottest regular wash cycle with detergent
 4. Dry these items separately from uncontaminated items, on the highest dryer setting

- Clean any toy or equipment that may enter a child's mouth with soapy water and then disinfect using **1** tablespoon of bleach in **1** gallon of water
- Remove organic matter on softer toys or equipment and launder them in the same way as clothing or textiles or, discard them if necessary
- Remove and discard soiled gloves
- Wash hands
- Remove and discard mask

Stability of Chlorine Bleach: Open bottles of concentrated chlorine bleach will lose effectiveness after 30 days. Change bottles of bleach every 30 days for accurate concentrations. For disinfecting, use an unopened bottle of chlorine bleach. Prepare a dilution of fresh bleach every day of use and discard unused portions.

I cannot stress enough how important hand washing is in preventing the spread of disease and illnesses. After using the restroom, sneezing, coughing, before and after food preparation, all children and staff should wash hands with warm running water and soap, using friction for 20 seconds. Hands should be dried with a single-service paper towel or air dry. It is recommended that persons involved in handling of utensils, cups, or any dishes exercise regular thorough hand washing.