



County of Erie

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HEALTH ADVISORY #278

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Reports of Gastroenteritis in School Age Children

Please distribute to Schools and Daycares.

Summary:

- In the past two weeks, schools throughout Erie County have reported increases in gastroenteritis (“stomach flu”) related absenteeism.
- Symptoms are mild and consist primarily of vomiting.
- Illness duration is typically 24-48 hours.
- A viral etiology is suspected.
- Frequent hand washing and implementation of routine cleaning and disinfection protocols are encouraged.

Background:

In the past two weeks, schools throughout Erie County have reported increases in gastroenteritis (“stomach flu”) related absenteeism through the Erie County Department of Health’s School Absenteeism Surveillance Program. Symptoms are reportedly mild, consistently primarily of vomiting. Illness is typically 24-48 hours in duration. A viral etiology is suspected.

Diagnosis and Treatment:

Gastroenteritis refers to the inflammation of the stomach and intestines that is often caused by viral pathogens. The majority of patients experience a self-limiting, mild illness for which medical treatment and laboratory testing is not recommended. Although the exact virus responsible for the current illnesses is unknown, rotavirus, norovirus and adenovirus infections can all result in symptoms like those recently reported. All of these viruses are known to circulate during the fall and winter months.

Treatment for gastroenteritis involves supportive care. Patients should be encouraged to drink as many fluids as possible since dehydration can occur as a result of gastroenteritis. Patients who are unable to increase fluid intake to replace fluids lost through vomiting and diarrhea should seek medical attention.

Infection Control Measures:

The viruses that cause gastroenteritis are spread through close contact with infected persons. Vomitus and stool are infectious. Frequent handwashing, prompt disinfection of contaminated surfaces, and prompt washing of soiled articles of clothing and linens should be encouraged.

Food may become contaminated after being handled by ill students and staff. Handwashing before and after eating should be encouraged.

Reporting:

Schools are encouraged to continue reporting through the School Absenteeism Surveillance Program to the Erie County Department of Health. For additional information, please contact the Epidemiology and Disease Control Program at 716-858-7697.

Additional Information:

CDC information on viral gastroenteritis: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/revb/gastro/faq.htm>

CDC information on norovirus: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/revb/gastro/norovirus-qa.htm>

Health Category Definitions:

Health Alert FLASH: conveys the highest level of importance due to a large-scale, catastrophic public health emergency; warrants immediate action or attention

Health Alert Priority: conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention to a health problem or situation

Health Advisory: provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action

Health Update: provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; no immediate action necessary

The ECDOH Health Alert & Advisory System is an e-mail notification system designed to alert community partners about important health related information. **You can sign up to receive alerts & advisories at www.erie.gov/health/services/health_professionals.asp.**

The Erie County Department of Health does not provide medical advice. The information provided herein and on the Erie County Department of Health website is not intended as a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always seek the advice of your personal physician or other qualified health provider with any questions you may have regarding a medical condition or issue. Never disregard professional medical advice or delay in seeking it because of the content found on the Erie County Department of Health website or this correspondence.