

# County of Erie

CHRIS COLLINS  
COUNTY EXECUTIVE

## DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

ANTHONY J. BILLITTIER IV, M.D., FACEP  
COMMISSIONER OF HEALTH

### HEALTH ADVISORY #231

MARCH 18, 2009

### INCREASED CASES OF GASTROINTESTINAL ILLNESS ASSOCIATED WITH EVENTS HELD AT THE ADAMS MARK HOTEL, BUFFALO, NY

Please distribute immediately to the Infection Control Department, Emergency Department, Infectious Disease Department, Director of Nursing, Medical Director, Laboratory Service, and all acute and primary care patient areas.

#### SUMMARY

- Erie County Department of Health (ECDOH), The New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH), and other local health departments are investigating an outbreak of gastrointestinal illness among visitors to two different events held at the Adams Mark Hotel in Buffalo, NY.
- Event 1 was a private banquet/party held on 2/28/09 with approximately 2,800 attendees. Of approximately 480 people interviewed, 200 experienced general gastrointestinal symptoms, including vomiting and diarrhea, with symptom onset beginning 3/1/09 and an illness duration of 48-72 hours. To date, no food items have been implicated and enteric panels on stool from three ill individuals have been negative. Viral testing is pending.
- Event 2 was a dance convention that was held throughout the weekend of 3/6 to 3/8/2009. This event brought together students and parents from approximately 25 dance schools from eight different states and Canada. Reports of illness among attendees began on 3/7/09 with symptoms of vomiting and diarrhea, similar in nature and duration to those experienced by attendees at event 1. Information on numbers of ill individuals, symptoms, and potential exposures is preliminary and the investigation is ongoing to identify additional ill attendees.
- The etiology of the gastrointestinal illness is unknown at this time, but based on clinical symptoms and duration of illness, it appears it may be caused by a viral agent, most likely calicivirus (commonly known as norovirus). Clinical specimens are being collected and sent to the NYSDOH Wadsworth Center Laboratory for viral testing.
- It is also unclear at present if these two events are related, but as a precaution, ECDOH has recommended that common areas at the hotel be thoroughly cleaned and sanitized before any additional large events are held at the facility.

## **REPORTING AND TESTING**

Physicians are asked to report to their local health department any gastrointestinal illness in an individual who visited the Adams Mark Hotel after 2/28/09. Your local health department will investigate the reported illness and determine whether clinical specimens are needed for viral testing at the NYSDOH Wadsworth Center Laboratory. Viral testing will not be needed for all reported cases once a representative sample of specimens is collected. Bacterial and parasitic testing at a commercial laboratory should be ordered as clinically indicated.

## **BACKGROUND ON CALICIVIRUSES**

Caliciviruses (commonly known as noroviruses) are a common causative agent of outbreaks of non-bacterial gastroenteritis in the United States. Infection is characterized as a self-limiting illness with clinical symptoms of nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal pain, low-grade fever, or a combination of these symptoms. Caliciviruses typically have an incubation period of 24-48 hours and symptoms characteristically last 12-60 hours. In general, children experience more vomiting than adults. Most people with norovirus illness have both vomiting and diarrhea.

## **INFECTION CONTROL**

- Individuals should frequently wash their hands, especially after toilet visits and changing diapers, and before eating or preparing food.
- Clothing or linens that become contaminated with stool or vomitus should be washed immediately using hot water and soap.
- Surfaces contaminated after an episode of illness should be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected using a bleach-based household cleaner.
- Hospitalized patients suspected of having a norovirus infection should be managed with standard precautions with careful attention to hand hygiene practices. Contact precautions should be implemented for any symptomatic patient who is incontinent of vomitus or stool. This should include wearing surgical or procedure masks, as the risk of aerosolization and spraying is increased with incontinent or vomiting patients. Persons cleaning areas heavily contaminated with vomitus or feces should wear surgical masks as well.
- Persons who work in a sensitive setting, such as patient care, food service, or day care, and are experiencing gastrointestinal illness should notify their employer and be excluded until symptoms resolve, unless the cause of illness is determined to be non-infectious.

## **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

If you have questions regarding this recent increase in gastrointestinal illnesses, please contact the Erie County Department of Health at (716) 858-7697, Monday thru Friday, 8:30am to 5:00pm.

For further information on Norwalk-Like viruses, please refer to the following resources:

- “Norwalk-Like Viruses: Public Health Consequences and Outbreak Management,”

MMWR Vol. 50 No. RR-9, available at:

<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/rr5009a1.htm>

- [http://www.nyhealth.gov/diseases/communicable/norwalk/fact\\_sheet.htm](http://www.nyhealth.gov/diseases/communicable/norwalk/fact_sheet.htm)

- <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/revb/gastro/norovirus-factsheet.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