



News from the Office of
ERIE COUNTY EXECUTIVE MARK POLONCARZ

NEWS RELEASE

Health Commissioner Dr. Gale Burstein

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It's not just Flu Season! Watch for Norovirus, the "Stomach Bug!"

Symptoms Include Nausea, Cramping; Handwashing Prevents Spread of Illness

ERIE COUNTY, NY— The Erie County Department of Health ("ECDOH") reminds us that it's not just flu season. It's also a peak time for spread of the Norovirus, commonly described as the "stomach bug".

"Norovirus is a very contagious virus that can infect anyone at any time. You can get it from an infected person, contaminated food or water or by touching contaminated surfaces" said **Erie County Health Commissioner Dr. Gale Burstein**. "Frequent hand-washing is the most important health tip for all of us to remember so that we don't spread illness" said Burstein. "Wash your hands carefully with soap and water especially after using the toilet and changing diapers, and always before eating, preparing, or handling food."

Noroviruses are the most common cause of gastroenteritis in the United States. CDC estimates that each year more than 20 million cases of acute gastroenteritis are caused by noroviruses. That means about 1 in every 15 Americans will get norovirus illness each year. Norovirus is also estimated to cause over 70,000 hospitalizations and 800 deaths each year in the United States.

You may hear norovirus illness called "food poisoning" or "stomach flu." It is true that food poisoning *can* be caused by noroviruses. But, other germs and chemicals can also cause food poisoning. Norovirus illness is *not* related to the flu (influenza), which is a respiratory illness caused by influenza virus.

Symptoms of norovirus infection usually include diarrhea, vomiting, nausea, and stomach cramping. Other, less common symptoms may include low-grade fever, chills, headache, muscle aches, and general sense of fatigue. Anyone can be infected with noroviruses and become ill. Also, you can get norovirus illness more than once during your life. The illness often begins suddenly. Norovirus illness is usually not serious. Most people get better in 1 to 2 days. But, norovirus illness can be serious in young children, the elderly, and people with other health conditions; it can lead to severe dehydration, hospitalization and even death.

There is no vaccine to prevent norovirus infection. Also, there is no drug to treat people who get sick from the virus. The best way to reduce your chance of getting norovirus is by washing your hands carefully with soap and water, especially after using the toilet and changing diapers and always before eating or preparing food. If soap and water aren't available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. These alcohol-based products can quickly reduce the number of germs on hands in some situations, but they are not a substitute for washing with soap and water.

For more Information:

Erie County Department of Health

www.erie.gov/health

New York State Department of Health

http://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/norwalk/fact_sheet.htm

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

<http://www.cdc.gov/Features/Norovirus/>