

**Office of the School Nurses
South Portland School Department
February 2008
PUBLIC HEALTH ALERT**

Dora Mills, M.D., M.P.H., the Public Health Director of the Maine Centers for Disease Control, has alerted all public schools in Maine about outbreaks of **Norovirus Gastroenteritis** in six counties in Maine. Two outbreaks have been in elementary schools. Outbreaks are also currently being reported in other areas of the nation. The Federal CDC estimates that 23 million cases of acute gastroenteritis per year are due to norovirus infection.

Norovirus infections are characterized by a **sudden onset** of symptoms, which usually include **nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and some stomach cramping**. Additionally, some persons have low-grade **fever, chills, headache, muscle aches, and malaise**. In most people the illness lasts 1 or 2 days.

Norovirus is **very highly contagious** and is transmitted in **stool** and **vomit**. Exposure can result through direct contact with a person who is ill, by consuming food or liquids that are prepared or handled by an ill person, and through contact with surfaces or objects contaminated by vomit or stool. The virus can live on surfaces for prolonged periods at a wide range of temperatures. Noroviruses can also spread via a droplet route from vomit.

Infected individuals should refrain from **attending school**, food handling, child care, and recreational water activity, **until at least 48 hours after symptoms have resolved**. No specific treatment exists for Norovirus Gastroenteritis. Fluid intake is most important.

Norovirus can be **easily spread from person to person** through direct and indirect contact with stool and vomit. Particular care should be taken by ill persons who prepare food for others, and with young **children in diapers** who may have diarrhea. Patients and their close contacts should **wash their hands frequently with soap and water**, and should be aware that **contagion will likely continue for at least 2 days after recovery from their symptoms**.

**The Public Health Director of the Maine Centers for Disease Control
has made the following request:**

Schools are asked to alert parents about Norovirus outbreaks and to request that ill children remain at home while they have symptoms of Norovirus Gastroenteritis and for at least 48 hours after symptoms disappear.

Thank you for reminding your family members to wash hands frequently at home and at school, and for helping to prevent the spread of Norovirus and other illnesses.

For More Information:

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/revb/gastro/norovirus-ga.htm>