

KNOW THE FACTS!

Gastroenteritis in a Retirement/Assisted Living Facility

Gastrointestinal illness (diarrhea and vomiting) is caused by a virus which can easily spread among residents, staff and visitors of a retirement community.

How does it spread?

Noroviruses, the most common cause of gastrointestinal illness, are very contagious and spread easily from person to person. The virus is found in the stool and vomit of infected people.

People can become infected in several ways, including eating food or drinking liquids that are contaminated by infected food handlers, touching surfaces or objects contaminated with norovirus and then touching their mouth before hand washing, or having direct contact with another person who is infected and then touching their mouth before hand washing.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms may include sudden onset of diarrhea, and vomiting, which can be accompanied by nausea, fever, headache, fatigue.

What should visitors and workers do?

Individuals should not visit the facility if they are having diarrhea and/or vomiting. As well, workers are strongly advised to stay home if they are sick.

For more information, you may contact the Disease Prevention Division of Hamilton County Public Health at (513) 946-7849.



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250 William Howard Taft Road, 2nd Floor
Cincinnati, OH 45219
Phone 513.946.7800 Fax 513.946.7890
hamiltoncountyhealth.org

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Gastroenteritis (cont.)

What can residents do to decrease the chance of developing gastrointestinal illnesses?

Hand washing is essential! Proper hand washing, cleaning and sanitizing should be practiced all the time to prevent diarrhea and other illnesses.

Hand washing is the single most important way to stop the spread of disease. Hands should be washed using soap and warm water. Scrub hands working up a good lather then rinse and towel dry. An alcohol hand rinse can be used after hand washing to further reduce the number of organisms on your hands.

Always wash hands:

- After using the toilet
- After handling soiled diapers, undergarments, towels, face cloths and bedding.
- Before and after preparing and eating food
- Carefully wash fruits and vegetables

What if I suddenly develop diarrhea and/or vomiting?

- Let the nurse or administrator at the facility know that you are experiencing vomiting and/or diarrhea.
- Flush or discard any vomitus and/or stool in the toilet and make sure that the surrounding area is kept clean.
- Immediately remove and wash clothing/linens that may be contaminated after an episode of illness (use hot water and soap).
- Avoid shaking the laundry because this might spread germs into the environment.
- Thoroughly clean and disinfect contaminated surfaces immediately after an episode of illness by using a bleach-based household cleaner.
- Persons who are infected with GI illness should not prepare food while they have symptoms and for 3 days after they recover from their illness.

Why is gastroenteritis a concern for the elderly population?

Because of their age, gastroenteritis is a more serious concern for older adults. Loss of fluids resulting from vomiting and diarrhea can lead to life threatening dehydration. Fluid replacement is very important for management of gastrointestinal illness.

How can I decrease the chance of dehydration?

Increase your fluid intake with diluted fruit juices, sports drinks, broths and also:

- Eat broth-based soups and saltine crackers which provide additional water and salt
- Eat a bland diet emphasizing bananas, clear soups, boiled white rice, gelatin and boiled vegetables.

Try to avoid:

- Beverages containing caffeine
- Fatty or fried foods
- Raw vegetables
- Fruit seeds, skins and stringy fibers
- Vegetables with a lot of fiber such as broccoli, corn, dried beans, cabbage, peas and cauliflower

Limit dairy products which may further irritate bowel and aggravate diarrhea.



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