

News from the Wyoming Department of Health

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Norovirus Again Causing Illness in Wyoming Communities

Norovirus is again causing illnesses in Wyoming, with increased reports recently coming in from Casper and Cheyenne, according to the Wyoming Department of Health (WDH).

Commonly describe as “stomach flu” or “food poisoning,” norovirus is spread when people eat or drink contaminated food and beverages, touch surfaces contaminated with the virus or through close contact with someone already sick.

Cody Loveland, WDH surveillance epidemiologist, said norovirus spreads easily in places where people are typically in close contact such as schools, daycares and nursing homes. “That’s exactly what’s being reported from both Casper and Cheyenne right now,” Loveland said.

People who are sick with norovirus may experience nausea, vomiting, watery diarrhea, stomach cramps, fatigue and dehydration.

Illness can hit quickly between 12 to 48 hours after a person has been exposed. Symptoms usually last from one to three days and go away without causing long-term problems. However, because norovirus can be serious when people become dehydrated, those who become severely ill may need to call or visit a medical professional. Infants, young children, immune-compromised persons, and persons unable to care for themselves, such as the disabled or elderly, are at higher risk for dehydration and may need hospitalization.

“Many people blame the last thing they ate when they get sick, but norovirus is spread through many routes other than just food,” said Loveland.

“Norovirus illnesses can be prevented,” Loveland said. “Good hand washing is critical because people can still be contagious and spread the virus for a few days after symptoms end.”

Recommended steps to help prevent illness include:

- Frequently wash hands, especially after using the restroom or changing diapers, and before eating or preparing food.
- If ill, stay home from work and school, especially if employed in food-handling, healthcare or child care.
- Thoroughly clean and disinfect contaminated surfaces immediately after an episode of vomiting or diarrhea with a solution of 1 cup household bleach per 1 gallon of water and letting the solution sit for one minute. Always follow manufacturers’ safety precautions.

- Immediately remove and wash contaminated clothing or linens after an episode of illness (use hot water and soap).
- Flush or discard any vomit and/or poop in the toilet and keep the surrounding area clean.
- Ill persons should take extra care to avoid spreading the virus by minimizing contact with other persons while ill and practicing good hygiene.

Loveland said other viruses and illnesses caused by bacteria contamination can cause similar symptoms, but norovirus is the most common culprit.

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