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of all people in Florida through integrated
state, county & community efforts.



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Vision: To be the Healthiest State in the Nation

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GASTROINTESTINAL INFECTIONS ON THE RISE IN ESCAMBIA COUNTY, FLORIDA
Health Officials Implement Heightened Surveillance Protocols
Continue to Encourage Proper Hygiene Practices

PENSACOLA, FL – An increased number of gastrointestinal (GI) infections have been reported in Escambia County, Florida. Since early March 2013, the Florida Department of Health in Escambia County (FDOH-EC) has investigated fourteen (14) GI outbreaks in the community. These outbreaks have been identified in various settings including one (1) neighborhood and its affiliated elementary school, seven (7) other elementary schools, two (2) childcare centers, and four (4) assisted living/long term care/skilled nursing facilities.

For each setting, specific guidance and education, as well as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) control measures, were implemented. These measures included:

- Keeping or sending students/staff showing symptoms of GI illness home from school or child care centers. Urging all ill persons to stay home until 48 hours after symptoms have resolved.
- Avoiding direct contact with infected persons and discarding or isolating food and personal items that have been contacted by infected persons.
- Reinforcing hygiene and environmental cleaning practices in the settings investigated.
- Monitoring the development of symptoms in teachers, classmates, and residential contacts of infected persons, as appropriate.
- Offering lab sampling of specimens collected from persons showing symptoms of GI illness.

As of April 3, 2013, the state lab has confirmed the presence of Norovirus in specimens from three discreet investigation settings. Additional specimens are currently pending at the state lab. The FDOH-EC Epidemiology Program remains on alert for GI-related outbreaks, and follow-up with implicated facilities is ongoing at this time.

Norovirus Is Highly Contagious

Norovirus and other GI infections can be highly contagious. They are usually spread through, person-to-person contact with an infected person, contact with contaminated surfaces, or contaminated food or drinking water. Symptoms can include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal pain, low to high grade fever, and headache. According to Dr. John Lanza, Director of the FDOH-EC, "Norovirus is the most common cause of GI illness in the U.S., accounting for over 20 million cases annually. Good hygiene practices and staying home when ill play an important role in preventing the spread of Norovirus and other infectious agents that can cause gastrointestinal illnesses."

Most gastrointestinal infections can be prevented with proper hygiene practices, staying home when ill, the use of clean drinking water, and safe food preparation. The best way to avoid contracting or spreading these infections is to take the following precautions:

- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water, especially after using the bathroom, handling diapers, and before preparing or eating food.
- Use proper hand washing practices by rubbing soapy water on hands and under fingernails for 15-20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based sanitizer.
- If you become ill, stay home. If your child becomes ill, keep him/her out of school or childcare until free from symptoms for 48 hours.
- If you are sick with vomiting or diarrhea, do not prepare food for other people.
- Thoroughly disinfect contaminated surfaces by using a bleach-based household cleaner.
- Immediately remove and wash clothing or linens that may be contaminated with a virus after an episode of diarrhea or vomiting.
- Cook foods properly and wash fruits and vegetables before serving. Use separate cutting boards and utensils for preparing meats, fish, vegetables, or fruits.

Treatment for gastrointestinal illness includes drinking plenty of fluids and adequate rest. Dehydration may be a concern, especially among elderly adults and young children, so it is important to maintain proper fluid replacement. Persons showing severe symptoms, including bloody stool, vomiting that does not resolve, high fever, or signs of dehydration such as reduced urination, should contact their doctor.

For more information about prevention of these infections through proper hand hygiene, please visit: <http://www.cdc.gov/handwashing>. If you are concerned that you have a gastrointestinal infection, please contact your doctor.

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