

Controlling Viral Gastroenteritis Outbreaks

Viral gastroenteritis is highly infectious and outbreaks are very common and can be difficult to control. Outbreaks often occur in institutional settings such as nursing homes, hospitals, child care centres and schools. There are several things you can do to help reduce the spread of infection.

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Hand washing

The following precautions should be in place to ensure thorough hand washing:

- Make sure that hand washing facilities are available for staff, students, residents and visitors.
- Alert staff, students, residents and visitors to the outbreak and the need for thorough and frequent hand washing, and post hand washing signs in toilet and care areas.
- Staff and visitors should wash their hands thoroughly with soap and running water for at least 15 seconds and dry their hands with a disposable or clean towel, even if they have been wearing gloves:
 - before and after any patient care
 - after contact with a person with gastroenteritis
 - after going to the toilet
 - after changing nappies
 - before eating or preparing/handling food.

Isolation and restriction

The following precautions should be taken to isolate and restrict the spread of gastroenteritis:

- Cases that reside in an institution should be cohorted (separated from non-infected residents) if possible. This may include separate facilities for hand washing, toilet and bathroom.
- Avoid the transfer of patients between and within institutions until the outbreak is over. Where a case must be transferred for hospital care, the hospital should be told about the outbreak in advance.
- Staff members with gastroenteritis who care for patients, prepare food or assist in the feeding of patients should be excluded from these activities for 48 hours after their symptoms have ceased.
- Visitors should be discouraged from attending the premises while the outbreak is occurring.
- If the outbreak continues and new admissions are considered to be at risk of infection, consider closing the facility to new admissions

Cleaning

Surfaces or objects that have been exposed to vomit or faeces must be thoroughly cleaned as soon as possible.

Wash the surface or object with hot water and a neutral detergent.

Where possible, disinfect hard surfaces and objects with freshly prepared hypochlorite 1,000 ppm (0.1 per cent) solution.

Allow objects to dry thoroughly after they have been cleaned.

Protect yourself

When handling vomit or faeces, wear disposable gloves, mask and impermeable protective clothing (eg. a plastic apron). Protective eyewear should be worn if there is potential for splash from blood or body fluids.

Use disposable towels to remove faeces and vomitus, and seal in a plastic bag before disposing of them in clinical waste.

Wash your hands after you have removed gloves and protective clothing.

Notification

Managers of facilities where an outbreak of viral gastroenteritis is occurring should:

- report the outbreak to their local Public Health Unit. Staff can provide advice and assistance on controlling further spread, samples that should be collected, and the type of testing that should be carried out.
- document the number of cases, dates of onset, duration of symptoms and report to their local Public Health Unit
- private health facilities (private hospitals, nursing homes, hostels) should report outbreaks of gastroenteritis to the Private Health Care Branch, NSW Health.

Related document

- [Viral gastroenteritis factsheet](#)

Further information – Public Health Units in NSW					
For more information please contact your doctor, local public health unit or community health centre – look under <i>NSW Government</i> at the front of the White Pages.					
Metropolitan Areas			Rural Areas		
Northern Sydney / Central Coast	Hornsby	02 9477 9400	Greater Southern	Goulburn	02 4824 1837
	Gosford	02 4349 4845		Albury	02 6021 4799
South Eastern Sydney / Illawarra	Randwick	02 9382 8333	Greater Western	Broken Hill	08 8080 1499
	Wollongong	02 4221 6700		Dubbo	02 6841 5569
Sydney South West	Camperdown	02 9515 9420		Bathurst	02 6339 5601
	Liverpool	02 9828 5944	Hunter / New England	Newcastle	02 4924 6477
Sydney West	Penrith	02 4734 2022		Tamworth	02 6767 8630
	Parramatta	02 9840 3603	North Coast	Port Macquarie	02 6588 2750
Justice Health Service	Matraville	02 9311 2707		Lismore	02 6620 7500
NSW Department of Health	Nth Sydney	02 9391 9000			
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