

VIRAL GASTROENTERITIS UPDATE

Information for Early Childhood and Vacation Care Directors

Please distribute this information to all staff



Health

Key points:

1. Gastroenteritis outbreaks are increasing in early childhood and school settings across NSW
2. Alert your staff to report symptoms of viral gastroenteritis in either children or themselves
3. Reinforce basic hygiene measures, such as regular hand washing with soap and warm water, to prevent the spread of infection
4. Exclude sick children and staff for at least 48 hours after their last symptoms
5. Promptly notify your local public health unit if an outbreak is suspected.

Summary

Gastroenteritis outbreaks are increasing in NSW with over 224 outbreaks of viral gastroenteritis reported in childcare facilities since 1 September 2024. This is 50 percent more than the previous month. At least 1,532 children and 313 staff have so far been affected. The outbreaks have been caused by a mix of viral pathogens, including rotavirus and norovirus.

Actions to prevent spread

- Alert your staff to report symptoms of gastroenteritis in either children or themselves
- Reinforce basic hygiene measures, such as regular hand washing (pay close attention to hand washing with soap and warm water after nappy changes), regular cleaning and disinfecting hard surfaces, and providing education to staff and parents help prevent the spread of infections
- Exclude sick children and staff from attending the centre for **at least 48 hours** after their symptoms settle, and encourage them to visit their local GP, who may arrange testing
- Wear gloves and a mask if cleaning up bodily fluids, including vomit. Disinfect surfaces with a freshly made sodium hypochlorite solution
- Promptly notify your local public health unit on **1300 066 055** (or through online notification where this is available) if an outbreak is suspected.
- An outbreak should be suspected when **2 or more children or staff** have sudden onset of vomiting or diarrhoea **in a 2-day period**. Reporting is required under the Public Health Act.

About viral gastroenteritis

Viral gastroenteritis usually starts with sudden onset of vomiting and/or diarrhoea. It is highly infectious and can spread rapidly in childcare centres. It spreads through the vomit or faeces of an infected person through close contact, contaminated surfaces, consuming contaminated food or drink, and/or from person-to-person through unwashed hands

Viral gastroenteritis is a common intestinal infection caused by a number of different viruses. Norovirus infections are the most common cause during the cooler months. Rotavirus is the most common cause of severe gastroenteritis in early childhood globally. Immunisation to prevent or reduce the severity of rotavirus infection is free for children under six months of age.

Further information

Resources to assist in the management of viral gastroenteritis in child care centres are available at: <http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/gastroenteritis/Pages/default.aspx>

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Keira Glasgow'.

Keira Glasgow

Director, One Health Branch
Health Protection NSW

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