



GI Illness (VGE) Outbreak in Schools & Childcare

Resource Guide

GI Illness (VGE) Quick Reference

VGE Symptoms	Common symptoms include: nausea, vomiting, abdominal cramps, watery (non-bloody) diarrhea
Incubation Period	12-48 hours
Period of Communicability	Norovirus is shed for at least 48 to 72 hours after resolution of all symptoms. However, studies have demonstrated the presence of virus in the stool for several months after infection. Additional research is needed to determine length of infectiousness.
Treatment	For most people, viral gastroenteritis is a self-limited illness of a few days' duration. In severe cases, dehydration and electrolyte imbalance can be potentially fatal, especially in the elderly.
When to Report to CCHHS	When absenteeism linked to GI illness is $\geq 10\%$ in a specific school and/or classroom OR when two or more students in the same classroom have diarrhea and/or vomiting within 24 hours of each other OR when you have had two or more confirmed norovirus cases in a core group of staff/students.
How to Report to CCHHS	Upload a line list securely online OR fax a line list to the secure fax line at (360) 425-7531. If the online upload link does not work, copy and paste it into an internet browser: https://apps.co.cowlitz.wa.us/Forms/SecureUploadHHS
What to Report to CCHHS	A line list of symptomatic students and staff.

Gastrointestinal (GI) illness outbreaks frequently occur in schools, childcare settings, and other educational settings. Norovirus is the most common cause of GI illness and can spread easily in schools due to close contact, common spaces, and shared surfaces.

In the event of a VGE outbreak, CCHHS will work with the school to determine appropriate response and the need for any additional control measures based on CDC and Washington State Department of Health recommendations. Control measures will be determined on a case-by-case basis in response to that particular outbreak. Control measures should be continued until the outbreak is declared over, typically 96 hours after the last onset of diarrhea and/or vomiting in students or staff.

What are the Reporting Requirements?

- In Cowlitz County, CCHHS asks that schools report the following:
 - When absenteeism linked to GI illness is $> 10\%$ in a specific school and/or classroom
 - When two or more students in the same classroom have diarrhea and/or vomiting within 24 hours of each other
 - When there are two or more confirmed norovirus cases in a core group of staff/students

How do I report an outbreak to Cowlitz County Health & Human Services?

- To report a suspected or confirmed outbreak, schools can upload a line list securely [online](#) OR fax a line list to the secure fax line at (360) 425-7531. If the online upload link does not work, it can be copied and pasted into an internet browser: <https://apps.co.cowlitz.wa.us/Forms/SecureUploadHHS>. If schools have questions or aren't sure if they are having an outbreak, CCHHS can be reached via phone at (360) 414-5599 extension 6431.

Infection Prevention Control Measures

Before an Outbreak Occurs

- Have policies and procedures in place for:
 - Responding to individual cases and outbreaks of GI in schools that outlines the chains of communication needed to manage and report outbreaks.
 - Implementing a staff and parent notification system following an exposure or outbreak.
 - Tracking the number of student and staff absences due to similar symptoms.
 - Enhanced cleaning procedures during GI outbreaks.
- Ensure appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) is available and staff are trained on correct use.
- Review and update work-exclusion policies that allow staff to remain out of work if they have symptoms of GI illness.

During an Outbreak

- Provide education to students, staff, and volunteers on common norovirus symptoms, proper hand washing, and modes of transmission.
- Exclude ill staff from work for a minimum of 24 hours after the resolution of symptoms.
- Exclude ill students from school for a minimum of 24 hours after the resolution of symptoms.
- Ensure hand washing stations are supplied with adequate supplies of soap, paper towels, and hands-free trash bins.
- Track GI illnesses on the line list and submit to CCHHS when new cases are added.
- If GI illness is widespread or a student with confirmed norovirus attended while potentially contagious, distribute a notification letter to those who were potentially exposed (e.g. classroom or entire school). CCHHS has a letter template available for school use.
- Increase the frequency of routine cleaning.
- Custodial staff should wear masks when cleaning areas that are contaminated with feces or vomit.
- Cleaners that are specifically labeled to be effective against norovirus should be used. For information on EPA-approved cleaners visit: [List G: EPA's Registered Antimicrobial Products Effective Against Norovirus](#).
- Clean toys and shared supplies daily, and immediately after being soiled by vomit or stool.

After an Outbreak

- Evaluate your facility's response.
- Develop action plans to address any identified areas of concern regarding facility readiness and response.
- Review and update staff training regarding applicable policies and procedures with focus on infection prevention practices.

Additional Resources

- CDC:

- [CDC Norovirus Illness Key Facts](#)
 - [Stop Norovirus Poster](#)
- EPA:
 - [EPA Disinfectants for Norovirus](#)