



WASHINGTON COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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To All Long Term Care Infection Control Practitioners:

Wisconsin public health officials are predicting the 2008 norovirus season will be similar to 2007, in which there were unusually high numbers of outbreaks in nursing homes and other extended care facilities. Norovirus accounted for 32 outbreaks, 1416 cases, 22 hospitalizations, and one death. Other outbreaks of unknown origin, known as Acute Gastrointestinal Enteritis, accounted for 11 outbreaks, 259 cases, 2 hospitalizations, and two deaths.

Due to these recent increases in norovirus activity and the potential to cause outbreaks in long term care facilities, the Bureau of Communicable Diseases and Preparedness (BCDP) recommends that ALL residents of long term care facilities with signs and symptoms of norovirus infection (sudden onset of vomiting, watery, non-bloody diarrhea, abdominal cramping, chills, body aches, fatigue) be empirically placed in contact precautions. This is a more stringent recommendation than indicated in the CDC isolation guidelines, which recommend only diapered and incontinent ill residents be placed in contact precautions or that contact precautions are used in outbreak situations. It seems prudent, however, given the potential for heavy environmental contamination from norovirus cases and the subsequent risk of transmission, coupled with high norovirus activity in facilities, that extra steps be used to help reduce transmission.

We recognize this recommendation demands more energy and resources from our health care partners, but believe it a reasonable strategy in helping reduce norovirus infections in long term care settings.

Thank you for your cooperation, and if you have any questions please contact Gwen Borlaug at 608-267-7711 or John Archer at 608-267-9009.

ADDENDUM:

It was suggested by a local public health nurse that we also remind health care facilities to report outbreaks of norovirus. There are three important reasons why you should notify your local public health agency if your facility is experiencing a norovirus outbreak.

- 1) The local public health staff can provide technical assistance in controlling the outbreak.
- 2) You must get permission from the local public agency to qualify for fee exempt norovirus testing at the State Laboratory of Hygiene.
- 3) Reporting is required by HFS 145 Admin Rule that states outbreaks of acute illnesses are reportable.

Go to <http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov/communicable/resources/pdffiles/NoroTestCrit%20.pdf> for definitions and testing criteria.

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