



Public Health Update

Community-wide gastroenteritis increase

May 23, 2006

Since the beginning of May, Southern Nevada Health District surveillance systems have identified an increase in gastrointestinal illnesses complaints from Clark County residents. Symptoms of gastrointestinal illness include diarrhea and vomiting.

This type of gastroenteritis is most often caused by viruses, and is spread from person-to-person. No outbreaks have been associated with restaurants, schools or other commercial establishments. Because of the widespread nature of the disease in the community, it is expected that a number of patients will report foods as a common exposure. Because person-to-person spread is common, a number of people who become ill will have consumed common foods.

Viral illnesses, such as the one currently circulating, do not respond to antibiotic treatment. The illness is not considered serious. Although people may feel very sick and vomit several times a day, the illness usually resolves in 36-48 hours, leaving no lasting health impact. Occasionally, people are unable to drink enough liquids to replace fluids lost through vomiting and diarrhea. These people can become dehydrated and may need medical attention. Severe dehydration is usually a concern in the very young, the elderly and those with weakened immune systems.

The disease is easily spread from person-to-person by:

- Touching contaminated surfaces and then placing parts of the hand in the mouth or eye
- Being in direct contact with another person who is infected
- Eating food or drinking liquids contaminated by an ill person

Infected people are contagious from the moment they begin feeling ill to at least 3 days after recovery. People exhibiting symptoms of gastrointestinal illness should avoid close contact with others, and refrain from attending school or work until symptoms resolve.

It is extremely important for all people, both ill and well, to exercise good hand-washing and hygiene practices.

For more information or to report large clusters of ill people with common exposures (schools, restaurants, hotels, etc.), please contact the Southern Nevada Health District Office of Epidemiology at 759-1300, option #2.

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