

Gastroenteritis – Public Health Update

November 7, 2003

The Clark County Health District Office of Epidemiology has noticed an increase in gastrointestinal illness complaints from Clark County residents. In short, a higher number of people are reporting symptoms of diarrhea and vomiting. The increase appears to be community wide.

This type of gastroenteritis is most often caused by viruses, which are not affected by 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, though, people are unable to drink enough liquids to replace the fluids lost through vomiting and diarrhea. These people can become dehydrated and may need medical attention. Severe dehydration is usually only seen among the very young, the elderly and those with weakened immune systems.

Viral gastrointestinal illnesses are very contagious and can spread easily from person to person via the following routes:

- eating contaminated food or drinking contaminated liquids;
- 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.

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 the symptoms resolve. Additionally, it is extremely important for infected people to exercise good hand washing and hygienic practices.

For more information, please contact the Clark County Health District Office of Epidemiology between 8:00 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, at (702) 383-1378.

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