

# School Checklist for Suspect Outbreak of Gastroenteritis

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➤ **Question - "How do we know if there might be an outbreak of gastroenteritis at our school?"**

**Answer** - Outbreaks can generally be defined as an increase in illness above the expected, or normal rate. One general guideline that can be used as a rough indicator of an outbreak is a doubling in the number of students absent due to a vomiting and/or diarrheal illness over that of normal for a particular time of year. In this case, it is reasonable to initiate investigation and prevention measures. If you think there might be an outbreak, but you're not sure, please contact the McHenry County Department of Health (MCDH) Communicable Disease Program at **815-334-4500** as soon as possible for guidance.

➤ **Question - "Who should I call when there is (or I think there might be) an outbreak of gastrointestinal illness at our school?"**

**Answer** – Call the MCDH Communicable Disease Program at **815-334-4500** to report the outbreak and to obtain guidance. Have available the following listed information to expedite the process of determining an outbreak and the need for further investigation;

A. Provide the number of children and staff in school.

B. Start a line list with the number of children and staff ill with vomiting and/or diarrhea.

- Provide number ill vs. number well for each grade and classroom.
- Record the onset of symptoms for each ill individual.
- Record the symptoms for each individual.
- Record the names of students, teachers or staff that have seen a health care provider, including contact information for the health care provider, and test results, if known.

C. Compile a list of food service staff (those who have been ill, and those well).

D. Compile a list of extracurricular activities, clubs, special events that were held during the 2 weeks prior to the first illnesses (including birthday or holiday treats distributed in individual classrooms).

E. Obtain school lunch menu (breakfast and lunch) for the 2 weeks prior to the first illness.

F. Collect rosters for children who attend before/after school child care at the school.

G. Usual absentee rates for previous years.

➤ **If further investigation is deemed necessary by the MCDH Communicable disease program**, it will involve MCDH contacting ill and well students to determine specific sources of illness. To do this, the MCDH will need a roster of all students, including parent's names, home telephone number, grade, and classroom.

➤ **In conjunction with the McHenry County Department of Health, implement interim outbreak control measures while the investigation is ongoing:**

A. Restrict sharing of foods brought from student's/staff's homes.

B. Make sure students wash hands before eating

C. Redouble efforts to promote hand washing (i.e., educate children on proper technique and promote hand washing prior to every snack and meal). In the lower grades, supervise the hand washing.

D. Exclude children and staff who are experiencing symptoms of diarrhea and/or vomiting from school or daycare until **24 hours** after symptoms have stopped.

E. Staff involved in food preparation should be restricted from preparing food for **48 hours** after symptoms stop. The staff may perform other duties not associated with food preparation 24 hours after symptoms have stopped.

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- **Communication with staff and parents;** The school should communicate with staff and provide letters to the parents with. Regardless of the agent, the prevention measures outlined above should be stressed in communications to staff and parents. When the agent is identified, the MCDH will provide fact sheets and/or other information about the agent to the school. The MCDH can help craft the communication messages and review letters from the school to parents to ensure accuracy and completeness of the message.
  
- **Disinfecting the school**
  - A. Wearing of masks and gloves should be recommended to custodial staff that clean areas contaminated by feces or emesis (vomit).
  - B. Thoroughly clean and disinfect contaminated surfaces immediately after an episode of illness.
  - C. Clean and sanitize common high touch surfaces using household chlorine bleach (5.75%) solution (5 tablespoons/gallon of water) or a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) approved disinfectant for use in controlling norovirus in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions.
    - A list of EPA approved disinfectants is available at [www.epa.gov/oppad001/chemregindex.htm](http://www.epa.gov/oppad001/chemregindex.htm) .
    - The label or the manufacturer of the EPA approved disinfectant should be consulted to determine whether the disinfectant has efficacy for norovirus.
  - D. Disinfect the area well beyond the immediate area of contamination
  - E. Carpeting and furniture with cloth coverings should be steam cleaned.
  - F. Thoroughly disinfect all bathroom areas including toilet handles, door handles, sink handles.
  - G. Disinfect common touch areas such as desk tops, door knobs, railings and banisters with a 10% bleach solution 2 times a day during an active outbreak
  
- **Handwashing, Handwashing, Handwashing!!!**
  - A. Hand washing is the key to controlling all gastrointestinal outbreaks. This should be reinforced in the school and the message should be reinforced with the parents so hand washing becomes routine when the students and other family members are at home as well.
  - B. The MCDH can provide infection control/handwashing education for School staff. Arrange for this by calling the MCDH of Health Communicable Disease Program at **815-334-4500** or visit [www.idph.state.il.us/about/fdd/HandWash2.pdf](http://www.idph.state.il.us/about/fdd/HandWash2.pdf) for handwashing tips.