

Environmental Assessment— Norovirus



Norovirus is an extremely contagious virus and causes gastrointestinal symptoms (vomiting and/or diarrhea). It is spread by contaminated food or water, person-to-person contact, inhalation of aerosolized viral particles during vomiting or diarrhea or by contact with contaminated surfaces. Norovirus can survive on surfaces for two weeks, so cleaning and disinfecting surfaces with a strong sanitizing concentration is critical to end the outbreak.

Some key items to focus on while investigating a suspected norovirus outbreak:

- **Visit food establishment ASAP**—Prompt investigation and reporting are critical for customers, employees and household members of employees with gastrointestinal symptoms within one week of the meal date in order to stop the spread.
- **Exclusion**—Determine whether the ill employee has been excluded for 24 hours since the last occurrence of vomiting or diarrhea.
- **Observe hygiene practices and review illness policy**—Observe the handwashing and glove use practices of kitchen employees. Is there bare hand contact with ready-to-eat food being practiced by any employees?
- **Discard contaminated ready-to-eat food**—Food handled by an ill employee may need to be discarded if the employee worked while not excluded within 24 hours of gastrointestinal symptoms.
- **Proper cleanup of vomit with personal protective equipment (PPE)**—Use a disposable, absorbent material like paper towels, kitty litter, baking soda or disposable cloths for cleanup. Dispose of waste in a plastic trash bag. PPE consists of disposable gloves, mask and plastic apron. Do not use a vacuum cleaner. Wash hands often.
- **Disinfect**—Use 5,000 ppm chlorine bleach solution (1 2/3 cups per gallon of water) for porous surfaces and 1,000 ppm for hard surfaces (1/3 cup per gallon of water). Disinfect all common touch surfaces, equipment, utensils and any areas where people touch or have vomited.

When investigating norovirus outbreaks at a food establishment, focus on ill food handlers, their illness policy, handwashing and bare hand contact, and sanitizing practices.

Indiana is a voluntary participant with the CDC's National Environmental Assessment Reporting System (NEARS). Please visit the CDC's [NEARS](#) website for more information. Please contact the Indiana Department of Health Food Protection Division Rapid Response Team for assistance with the environmental assessment and completing NEARS forms, sampling supplies, and any other questions regarding the environmental response for a suspected norovirus outbreak.

For assistance, please contact:
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