



Important Health Information



The Charlotte County Health Department (CCHD) is investigating an increase in reported viral gastroenteritis in our community. This fact sheet is being provided to help Charlotte County residents and visitors learn how to protect themselves from illness. Please take a moment to review this important information.

Viral Gastroenteritis Fact Sheet

(Adapted from CDC)

What is viral gastroenteritis?

Gastroenteritis means inflammation of the stomach and intestines. Viral gastroenteritis is an infection caused by a variety of viruses that results in vomiting or diarrhea. It is often called the "stomach flu." Many different viruses can cause gastroenteritis, including rotavirus, norovirus, and certain adenoviruses. It is not caused by bacteria or parasites.

What are the symptoms of illness caused by viral gastroenteritis?

The symptoms of viral gastroenteritis usually include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and some stomach cramping. Sometimes people also have a low-grade fever, chills, headache, and fatigue. One of the more severe manifestations of viral gastroenteritis is dehydration. The onset of illness is usually sudden and usually lasts an average of 1-2 days.

How do people become infected with viral gastroenteritis?

Viruses that cause gastroenteritis are found in the stool or vomit of infected people. People can become infected with the virus in several ways, including:

- eating food or drinking liquids that are contaminated with virus;
- touching surfaces or objects contaminated with virus, and then placing their hand in their mouth;
- having direct contact with another person who is infected

Is viral gastroenteritis contagious?

Yes. It is very contagious and can spread easily from person to person. Both stool and vomit are infectious. Therefore, it is particularly important for people to use good handwashing and other hygienic practices. Persons in group environments such as day-cares, nursing homes, or assisted living facilities should take special precautions to prevent transmission in these settings.

What treatment is available for people with viral gastroenteritis?

Currently, there are no medications to treat these viral infections. Viral gastroenteritis cannot be treated with antibiotics because these medications are only effective at treating bacterial infections, not viral infections. Also, there is no vaccine to prevent infection. Viral gastroenteritis is self-limiting and usually brief in healthy individuals. Infected individuals, especially young children and the elderly, should drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration.

Can viral gastroenteritis be prevented?

You can decrease your chance of illness by following these preventive steps:

- Frequently wash your hands
- Carefully wash fruits and vegetables, and steam oysters before eating them
- Thoroughly clean and disinfect surfaces that may have been contaminated by infected persons
- Immediately remove and wash clothing or linens that may be contaminated

If you have any questions, please contact CCHD Disease Control and Prevention at (941) 639-1181.