



Connie Beck, Director
Social Services | Public Health | Mental Health

news release

Dec. 15, 2017

Norovirus outbreak hits Eureka-area school district

More than 130 students from the South Bay Union School District are sick from what Public Health officials believe to be a norovirus outbreak centered at Pine Hill School and affecting nearby South Bay and South Bay Charter schools.

One hundred and thirty-two students of 489 enrolled in the three-school district are out today. One hundred and one students were absent Thursday, while 88 missed school on Wednesday. An unknown number of staff members are also sick.

The Public Health Laboratory in Eureka has confirmed the presence of the highly contagious virus, which causes nausea, fever, vomiting, stomach pain and explosive watery diarrhea. Additional laboratory testing will be conducted today.

Officials have already documented cases of transmission from students to parents and other family members, so the number of current cases is likely higher.

Infected people typically show symptoms within 12 to 48 hours of exposure to the virus. Contagion is believed to last at least 24 hours after recovery.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the virus causes an acute inflammation of the stomach and intestines. People catch the virus by accidentally ingesting stool or vomit from an infected person. This typically happens by consuming contaminated food or liquids, touching contaminated surfaces or objects and then putting your fingers in your mouth, or sharing food or utensils with someone who is infected.

Parents, staff and children are strongly encouraged to go home from school or work if they have any sign of illness, and to remain there at least 24 hours after all symptoms have subsided.

There is no cure for norovirus, which generally passes on its own within a few days. The CDC notes that it cannot be treated with antibiotics, because it is a viral, rather than bacterial, infection. Drinking lots of fluids is recommended to replace those lost during the course of illness.

Hand washing is the best defense. Wash hands frequently throughout the day with soap and water. Hand sanitizing gels and wipes are ineffective against the virus. Clean contaminated surfaces thoroughly with a strong disinfectant such as bleach.

Even then the virus is often extremely difficult to contain. It can survive on surfaces for weeks, and few disinfectants are effective against it.

An outbreak in Yolo County earlier this year sickened an estimated 4,000 people, and despite exhaustive decontamination efforts resulted in the closure of several schools. The illness spread from Woodland to schools in West Sacramento, Winters, Esparto and Davis, including U.C. Davis.

Public Health officials are working side by side with the staff and superintendent of Pine Hill and South Bay schools, who have pledged their full support in combatting the spread of illness.

Department of Health & Humans Services' Public Health Director Michele Stephens said, "We are working quickly to help our local schools prevent further illness, particularly as we near the holiday break."

-# # #-

Follow us on Twitter: @HumCoDHHS and
Facebook: www.facebook.com/humcodhhs