



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

news release

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Norovirus outbreak prompts closure of Eureka City Schools

An increase in student absenteeism believed to be related to a norovirus outbreak has prompted Humboldt County Health Officer Dr. Donald Baird to recommend the closure of the 10 schools in the Eureka City Schools District.

These schools are Alice Birney Elementary, Eureka High School, Eureka Adult School, Grant Elementary, Lafayette Elementary, Washington Elementary, Winship Middle School, Winzler Children's Center, Zane Middle School and Zoe Barnum High School.

The closure will take effect tomorrow morning.

Baird's recommendation comes on the heels of increasing numbers of children reported to have symptoms consistent with the highly contagious virus, which forced closure of three schools last week.

Absenteeism rates at all Eureka City schools have climbed since Tuesday, with rates ranging from 13 percent at Washington to 32 percent at Zoe Barnum.

"Public Health had set 20 percent absenteeism as a trigger point for closure," Baird said, "but given the broad distribution of the virus we think the prudent course of action is to close all 10 schools."

As of yesterday, no schools in the Eureka City district had reached the 20 percent threshold.

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.

Symptoms include nausea, fever, vomiting, stomach pain and diarrhea.

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.

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.

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