Department of Public Health and Human Services

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DPHHS Technical Guidance on Norovirus: Outbreak management and disease prevention guidelines for retail food service establishments.

This document serves as guidance for hygiene and disinfection procedures for licensed retail food service establishments (e.g., restaurants, bars, delis, etc.) during confirmed and suspected norovirus outbreaks.

Norovirus is the most frequent cause of acute gastrointestinal illness in the United States. Norovirus is very contagious. People become ill after ingesting the virus as a result of contaminated food or water, touching contaminated surfaces, or after close contact with a person with norovirus.

Handwashing is the most important thing you can do to stop the spread of norovirus. Wash with soap and running water for at least 20 seconds before preparing food and any time your hands could be contaminated. Use a clean paper towel to dry hands, turn off sink faucets and open the door.

Sick employees with symptoms of nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, jaundice, sore throat with fever, or diagnosed illness may need to be excluded from the establishment or restricted from sensitive duties such as food preparation, food service, or some customer service. Contact your local health authority for more information.

Cleaning up any any vomitus or fecal accidents should occur as soon as possible, using disposable gloves. Use detergent with wet mopping, disposable paper towels, or steam clean carpets. Avoid walking through kitchens or other food service areas with any contaminated cleaning materials. Then use a sanitizing solution as described below. Do not vacuum right away, because vacuuming spreads the virus into the air. Although no official recommendations are available for when you can resume vacuuming, you may want to wait until the spot has been dry for 24 hours and the room can be left vacated.

Chlorine bleach solution is the recommended sanitizer, because it inactivates norovirus. During an outbreak or vomitus or fecal accident, a higher concentration of chlorine is needed. For best results, mix a fresh bleach solution daily and use test strips to verify the concentration. Never mix bleach with another chemical and follow the precautions on the label.

After removing all visible vomitus or fecal material, sanitize the accident area with 5000 ppm chlorine, which is a 1:10 dilution. Make the solution by adding 1 ½ cup household strength bleach into 1 gallon of warm water (75-100°F). Let the spot stay wet for 10 to 20 minutes. Rinse with water, then let air dry.

For areas surrounding the accident location, including washable floors, and items that the sick person may have touched such as doorknobs, light switches, toilets, sinks, chairs, menus, and condiment containers, use a 1000 ppm chlorine solution, or a 1:50 dilution. Make this solution by adding 1/3 cup bleach in 1 gallon of water. Let surfaces stay wet for 10-20 minutes. Rinse with water, then let air dry.

Wash dishes and other food contact surfaces with an approved routine hot temperature or chemical sanitizing method. If using chlorine, this would be 100 ppm for dishes and 200 ppm for wiping clothes.

If the accident occurred in an area where food is prepared, stored or served, or where dishes are stored, extra sanitizing of exposed surfaces will be needed because viruses dispersed through the air will settle with time. Use an approved cleaning and chemical sanitizing method for these surfaces.

References:

1. Montana Administrative Rule, Title 37, Chapter 110, subchapter 2. http://www.mtrules.org/gateway/Subchapterhome.asp?scn=37.110.2
2. US Public Health Service, Food & Drug Administration, 2009 Food Code. http://www.fda.gov/Food/FoodSafety/RetailFoodProtection/FoodCode/FoodCode2009/
3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Norovirus. http://www.cdc.gov/norovirus.
4. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), OSHA FactSheet: Noroviruses. http://www.osha.gov/Publications/norovirus-factsheet.pdf

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