



Gastroenteritis infection control advice for schools and childcare centres

Gastroenteritis

Facilities such as schools and child care centres occasionally experience clusters of gastroenteritis (diarrhoea and/or vomiting) in staff and children in their care. Where reports of vomiting and/or diarrhoea are above normal in a school or centre, the facility could be experiencing an outbreak.

One common cause of gastroenteritis outbreaks is norovirus, a virus that is highly infectious and can rapidly spread from person-to-person in settings such as schools and child care centres. Symptoms of norovirus include vomiting and diarrhoea.

Control of outbreaks

The most effective measures to control gastroenteritis outbreaks in facilities are to separate ill people from well people, and to clean contaminated environments. Below is a list of control activities that can be undertaken at your school/centre during an outbreak.

Provide information to parents and staff

- Display a gastroenteritis alert notice at the front desk and advise parents/staff about the outbreak and exclusion recommendations for ill children/staff.
- Provide links to gastroenteritis fact sheet healthywa.wa.gov.au/Articles/F_I/Gastroenteritis and norovirus fact sheet healthywa.wa.gov.au/Articles/N_R/Norovirus.
- Please inform your local Public Health Unit about the outbreak. healthywa.wa.gov.au/Articles/A_E/Contact-details-for-population-public-health-units

While people are ill

- Exclude staff and children until 24 hours (48 hours if childcare) after their last symptoms. Any ill food handlers in a school or centre should be excluded for 48 hours after their last symptoms.
- Encourage ill people to visit their GP and get a stool sample tested. It is important to determine what has caused the illness.
- In childcare and boarding settings, promptly remove and wash clothes or bedding contaminated with vomit or diarrhoea using detergent and hot water.
- If a child develops gastroenteritis at school/childcare, immediately move them to an isolated area such as a sick bay where they can be monitored away from other children. If possible, move other children from the room for at least 1 hour for clean up to occur. See cleaning / disinfection recommendations below.

Hand hygiene

- Increase the frequency of handwashing using soap and water, especially after toileting and before eating and drinking.
- Ensure there is sufficient soap in toilet areas. After washing hands, it is important that hands are dried with single use towels. Warm air dryers can also be useful for drying hands.
- Alcohol hand gels are not as effective as soap and water in killing viruses that cause gastroenteritis. However, if hand-washing facilities are not available use an alcohol-based gel.

Preparing and sharing food

- Ill food handlers can cause foodborne outbreaks. To help prevent people who are preparing food from becoming ill, food handlers where possible should not

directly serve food to other staff or children.

- If a food handler becomes ill, they should stop work immediately and leave the food preparation area, and be excluded from the workplace until 48 hours after their last symptoms.
- Discourage children from sharing food and drinks.
- Food should be served to children rather than children helping themselves from shared plates.

Cleaning

- Keep a record of the rooms / classrooms where children / staff are reporting illness, which will help target extra cleaning.
- Make up a spill kit for cleaning up vomit/diarrhoea which can include mops, buckets, household bleach, detergent, disposable wipes, paper towels (or other absorbent material), plastic bags, disposable gloves, face mask, disposable plastic aprons.
- Increase the frequency of cleaning over this period, particularly toilet/changing areas, eating areas, drinking taps/fountains, classrooms, door handles, architraves, desks, plastic toys, indoor and outdoor play/gym equipment. Use separate cloths and mop heads for cleaning toilet, bathroom areas or soiled areas and for cleaning other areas.
- After the initial clean with detergent, disinfect hard surfaces with a bleach solution (made fresh daily).
- It is important that bleach has enough contact time to work properly on surfaces. This is typically around 10 minutes.
- This bleach solution should be made to 1000 parts per million free chlorine (e.g. 125 ml household bleach to 5 litres water).
- For visibly contaminated areas, use a three step process that includes

- wipe up solids with paper towel and dispose of in a plastic bag
- clean with detergent solution and
- sanitise with diluted bleach.
- Discard cloths and mop heads after use or launder in hot water and detergent. The person doing the cleaning should wear appropriate personal protective equipment such as gloves, a mask and an apron.
- Clean carpet or soft furnishings contaminated with diarrhoea or vomit immediately using detergent and hot water and then steam clean.

Where to get help

- Centre/school management can contact their local Public Health Unit for advice healthywa.wa.gov.au/Articles/A_E/Contact-details-for-population-public-health-units.
- Ill people can visit their doctor or 'GP afterhours' or phone healthdirect Australia on 1800 022 222.
- See Staying Healthy In Childcare www.nhmrc.gov.au/guidelines-publications/ch55

Remember

- Gastroenteritis is often highly infectious.
- Excluding ill people and cleaning contaminated environments are effective means of preventing ongoing transmission and stopping an outbreak.

Acknowledgements
Public Health

This publication is provided for education and information purposes only. It is not a substitute for professional medical care. Information about a therapy, service, product or treatment does not imply endorsement and is not intended to replace advice from your healthcare professional. Readers should note that over time currency and completeness of the information may change. All users should seek advice from a qualified healthcare professional for a diagnosis and answers to their medical questions.