

# NEWS RELEASE

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## State Health Department Forecasts Arrival of Seasonal Stomach Bug

*Data Suggest an Increase in Norovirus*

Richmond, Va. – Statewide surveillance data monitored by the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) indicate that norovirus is arriving in Virginia just in time for the holidays.

Commonly referred to as “the stomach flu,” norovirus is a highly contagious gastrointestinal virus that causes vomiting, diarrhea and abdominal cramping. Norovirus circulates throughout the year in Virginia; however, illness typically increases during the winter months.

As part of the Commonwealth’s statewide readiness efforts, VDH has historically studied disease dynamics by analyzing data received from emergency departments and urgent care centers. “By tracking current disease surveillance data and applying that to established historical data trends, our experts are able to define baselines and thresholds for disease activity and make evidence-based predictions of when certain seasonal illnesses, like norovirus, will increase,” said State Health Commissioner Cynthia C. Romero, MD, FAAFP. “Based on current data analysis, we expect to see an increase in norovirus illness and outbreaks in Virginia over the next few weeks.”

Last season VDH investigated 184 norovirus outbreaks statewide in a variety of settings. Because the virus can significantly impact facilities such as day care centers, prisons/jails, schools and nursing homes, local health districts work closely with these facilities to minimize the severity of outbreaks and help prevent future outbreaks.

Although norovirus infection can cause a great deal of discomfort, it usually goes away on its own without requiring hospital care. Replacing lost fluids is key to preventing dehydration, especially in children and the elderly. Persons who become severely dehydrated should seek medical care.

“It is the time of year when families and friends are coming together to celebrate the holidays,” said Romero. “Norovirus is a sure way to dampen the holiday spirit, so being mindful of simple things like washing your hands or staying home if you are sick is especially important now.”

Because norovirus is so infectious and can survive on surfaces for prolonged periods, it is important to take steps to limit the spread of the virus. Here are some ways to do that:

- Wash hands often with warm water and soap
- Disinfect contaminated surfaces with bleach-based household cleaners
- Wash soiled clothing and linens with hot water and detergent
- Stay at home and do not prepare food for others when you are sick to avoid spreading the illness to others

For more details about preventing norovirus, visit

<http://www.cdc.gov/norovirus/preventing-infection.html>

Additional information about norovirus is available here:

<http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/Epidemiology/factsheets/pdf/Norovirus.pdf>

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