

GASTROINTESTINAL ILLNESS FACT SHEET AND OPERATIONAL PLAN December 2008

There is currently an increase in gastrointestinal (GI) illness in the Baltimore area. Much of the GI illness is due to norovirus which is highly contagious. Efforts to contain this virus both in the home and in the hospital are critical to prevent spread among patients, staff, visitors, and family members.

- **Symptoms: acute onset** nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, +/-fever
- **Incubation period:** usually 24-48 hours; usually self-limited
- **Duration of isolation for patients/furlough of staff:** 72 hours after symptoms resolve
- **Healthcare workers who have acute GI illness symptoms must:**
 - Not report to work and call their supervisor immediately
 - Be sent home if they report to work
 - Not come to work until they have been symptom free for 72 hours following last day of symptoms
- **Patients who have acute GI illness symptoms must:**
 - Be immediately placed in CONTACT PRECAUTIONS and if the patient is actively vomiting, face shields and/or masks should also be worn.
 - Remain on CONTACT PRECAUTIONS until 72 hours after their last symptom has stopped.
- **Report patients and healthcare workers with new onset GI symptoms** to hospital epidemiology and infection control (5-8384) or emergency beeper (3-3855)
 - Please fill out the GI illness questionnaire form for patient/staff member, available at www.hopkinsmedicine.org/HEIC and fax to HEIC at 4-0888.
- **Stool collection:** Send stool from patients with acute GI illness to the microbiology lab using the Pathology 5 form. Place stool specimen in a clear urine cup. Label the specimen "R/O Norwalk Virus: Attention Special Micro".
- **Staff cohorting:** cohort staff working with these patients as much as possible. Ideally these persons should NOT be working with other types of patients in the unit. When possible, assign staff who has recovered from recent acute GI illness to care for affected patients.
- **Staff protection:**
 - Strict hand hygiene before and after every patient encounter in all parts of the unit is encouraged. Soap and water is preferred over regular Purell after caring for patients with acute GI illness.
 - Healthcare workers should practice **Standard and Contact Precautions** and if the patient is actively vomiting, face shields should also be worn.
 - Gowns and gloves are required for any patient contact.
 - Tongs or other serving implements **MUST** be used to serve food in staff areas. Food **MUST** be covered. Communal sharing of food (e.g. many hands in the same bag of popcorn) **MUST** not occur.
- **Supplies:** Supplies are to be discarded after discharge of a patient with acute GI illness to prevent transmission. This organism is extremely hardy and will survive on surfaces.

- **Visitors:** All visitors should be screened for ANY of the acute GI illness symptoms described above. Please do not allow sick visitors onto the unit.
- **Cleaning:** All rooms and bathrooms of patients with vomiting and or diarrhea must be cleaned using Oxivir or bleach solution (1:10). Some units with high prevalence of GI illness will require widespread cleaning and disinfection with these agents as per HEIC and EVS.
 - Clean and disinfect high-touch surfaces (doorknobs, light switches, tables, counter tops, computer keyboards) every shift.
 - Rooms must be cleaned every 24 hours and on patient discharge. Walls, windows, beds, chairs, ledges must be included.
 - Clean and disinfect any time there is gross contamination (spill, vomiting, diarrhea).
 - Bathrooms should be cleaned every shift and if visibly soiled with special attention given to the toilet and fixtures.
 - If staff bathrooms are used by individuals with active GI illness, they must be cleaned immediately.
 - The mop head and mop water must be changed after cleaning a room of a patient with active GI illness.
 - If soiled or if contaminated, remove and replace curtains.
 - Patient servers should be emptied, their contents discarded, and cleaned before restocking.

THE IMPORTANCE OF STRICT HAND HYGIENE AND THOROUGH AND CORRECT ENVIRONMENTAL CLEANING CANNOT BE OVER-EMPHASIZED.