Symptoms
Diarrhea, vomiting, nausea, and stomach ache are the most common symptoms. Fever (usually low-grade), headache, and body aches are also reported.

‘Stomach flu’
“Stomach Flu” is a common misnomer for norovirus, which is not related to influenza virus. Norovirus is not spread through airborne transmission.

Incubation & Duration
Individuals generally become ill 12 – 48 hours after exposure (swallowing norovirus). The acute phase of illness typically lasts 1 to 3 days.

Transmission
Norovirus is spread via the fecal-oral route. Infected individuals shed the virus in their stool and vomit, which can then contaminate food, surfaces, and objects. The virus spreads to others when they consume or contact the contaminated items. Virus can be shed in the stool for a few weeks after recovery.

Reporting
Multiple cases with norovirus-like symptoms, including suspected outbreaks, must be reported. Call MDH at 1-877-FOOD-ILL, email health.foodill@state.mn.us, or contact your local health department.

Norovirus Outbreaks by Setting, Minnesota, 2009-2017

Norovirus Outbreaks Reported in Schools, 2009 - 2016, Minnesota

Norovirus Outbreaks by Setting, Minnesota, 2009-2017

www.health.state.mn.us
Greetings from the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) Foodborne Diseases Unit!

WHO WE ARE & WHAT WE DO

At MDH, one of the things we are charged with is investigating, tracking, and controlling gastrointestinal (GI) illness outbreaks. In schools, the most common cause of acute GI illness outbreaks is norovirus (often referred to by the misnomer “stomach flu”), though outbreaks can also be caused by a variety of other pathogens (e.g., Salmonella, Shiga toxin-producing E. coli, and others).

We are here to help with an outbreak at your school, including answering questions and determining the best strategies for outbreak control. We will also document the outbreak to better understand disease burden and trends.

WHEN TO REPORT A SUSPECTED OUTBREAK

By Minnesota state law (Minn. Rules part 4605.7050), “any pattern of cases, suspected cases, or increased incidence of any illness beyond the expected number of cases in a given period” shall be reported immediately to MDH. This includes suspected outbreaks, increases in GI illnesses, or unusual disease activity at your school. Here are some examples of when to report:

1. Illnesses above established baseline
   Determine what the baseline incidence of GI illness is in your school based on daily absence records. Report to MDH when the number or percent of illnesses rises above your baseline (e.g., double the number of absences due to vomiting or diarrhea).

2. Multiple cases in one classroom or group (e.g., sports or other activity groups)

3. More staff calling in sick with GI symptoms than usual

HOW TO REPORT

Call or email the MDH Foodborne Diseases Unit:

Phone: 651-201-5655 (Toll Free: 1-877-366-3455)  
Email: health.foodill@state.mn.us

We will notify your field epidemiologist or local public health department as needed. You can also contact your field epidemiologist or local public health department directly, and they will pass the information to MDH.

This packet is intended for use during a suspected outbreak of acute viral gastroenteritis at your school. The intent is to: 1) provide guidance on implementing measures to stop the outbreak and determine its cause, and 2) collect data on the outbreak to prevent future outbreaks and inform disease burden estimates. Please have a low threshold to contact us with any questions or concerns regarding diarrheal/vomiting illnesses at your school.

Sincerely,

Amy Saupe, MPH
Epidemiologist Senior
Foodborne Diseases Unit

Carly Baade
Health Program Representative
Foodborne Diseases Unit
Norovirus Toolkit • Checklist

Use this checklist for outbreak response

REPORT

- Report the possible outbreak when you detect an increase in illnesses above the expected baseline, or “normal” rate (e.g., double the normal absence rate due to vomiting or diarrhea).
  - Call your local (i.e., city or county) health department, field epidemiologist or notify the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH).
    Phone: 651-201-5655  (Toll Free: 1-877-366-3455)  Email: health.foodill@state.mn.us

- Information MDH will ask for:
  - What date did the earliest illness start? When did the other illnesses occur?
  - How many students do you have in the school? How many have been ill?
  - How many staff members do you have in the school? How many have been ill?
  - What symptoms did ill individuals have? What is the approximate duration of illness?
  - Have the ill individuals been in one grade, classroom, or activity group or spread across the school?
  - Have any kitchen staff been ill?

DOCUMENT

- Use the STUDENT ILLNESS LOG and STAFF ILLNESS LOG to document illnesses among staff and students.
  - You may also pull this information from your attendance system and send. Please try to include as much of the information on the logs as you can in the report.

- Send both ILLNESS LOGS back to MDH within 2 business days of reporting the suspected outbreak. It’s okay if it’s not complete, you’ll send a complete one at the end of the outbreak.
  - Epidemiology staff will use this to assess A) which pathogen is causing the outbreak, B) the likely route of transmission, and C) whether additional prevention measures are needed.

- Gather additional information.
  - List activities, events, field trips etc., held during the week prior to the first illness (especially if food was served).
  - Determine when and where there were any vomiting incidents or diarrheal accidents in the facility.
  - If requested by MDH, provide menus (breakfast and lunch).
  - If requested by MDH, provide names and phone numbers for staff and/or students (in rare cases, MDH may want to conduct interviews).

- Stool samples are important to confirm the outbreak etiology, and determine burden of various pathogen strains. Please distribute stool sample collection kits to 3 students (obtain parent permission if <18) or staff (MDH will provide kits; the testing is free of charge at the MDH Public Health Laboratory).
  - MDH will provide results.
  - MDH will contact you for the parent/guardian or staff contact information for any stool kits submitted.
  - If stools from students or staff were tested at a clinical laboratory, notify MDH of any results.

- Send both completed ILLNESS LOGS (or final attendance information) back to MDH between 1 and 2 weeks after the last illness.
  - This information is used to report to the National Outbreak Reporting System (NORS) (www.cdc.gov/nors/) and helps us understand disease burden and trends. Your facility name is not reported.
IMPLEMENT OUTBREAK CONTROL MEASURES

GENERAL
- Promote hand hygiene (e.g., hand washing posters in bathrooms).
  - Traditional alcohol-based hand sanitizers are not effective against common gastrointestinal pathogens such as norovirus. Wash hands with soap and water to remove pathogens.
- Restrict sharing of communal food/snack items in classrooms and cafeteria (e.g., food sharing table, shared snacks that are not individually portioned).

STUDENTS
- Monitor for student illness (record on STUDENT ILLNESS LOG).
- Have students stay home from school while ill with vomiting or diarrhea (or follow district policy, if more strict).

STAFF
- Monitor for staff illness (record on STAFF ILLNESS LOG).
- Make sure staff are aware of the outbreak, transmission route, and prevention measures (including handwashing, sending vomiting students home promptly, and asking for cleaning assistance if needed) – consider sending an email to staff; see example in appendix.
  - Remind staff of the importance of proper handwashing after using the bathroom, and before food prep, and snacks/meals.
  - Restrict communal goods sharing in staff break room (e.g., bowls of candy/snacks, trays of cookies).

CLEAN
- Notify custodial staff of special cleaning consideration for norovirus.
- Immediately clean/sanitize the facility. Focus on frequently touched surfaces and objects (e.g., bathrooms, door handles, counters, tables, water fountains, toys in younger classrooms, etc.).
  - Clean all surfaces with soap and water. Rinse.
  - Sanitize all surfaces with a disinfectant that is effective against norovirus. Norovirus is a hardy organism that is not killed by regular bleach solution, quaternary ammonia, or alcohol-based hand sanitizers. Use one of these products: 1. Sanitizer with a norovirus claim (see FAQ). Check that the label on your sanitizer specifically says that it is effective against norovirus. Use as directed on the packaging (some sanitizers have a long contact time to kill norovirus).
    - Strong (1000 ppm) bleach solution mixed fresh daily: 1 gallon water + 1/3 cup bleach.
      - For food contact surfaces, rinse with clean water after sanitizing solution has fully dried.
      - Wear PPE and use ventilation when applying this solution.
- Clean/sanitize at least daily until the outbreak is over (1 week after last illness onset).
- Clean up vomiting or diarrheal incidents immediately.
  - Use appropriate procedures to prevent those doing the cleaning from getting sick (see RESOURCES).
  - Never use a vacuum to clean up vomit.

FOOD SERVICE
Kitchen staff can be a source for ongoing transmission of illness from contaminated food.
- Contact your kitchen department to determine if kitchen staff are ill (add them to the STAFF ILLNESS LOG). Notify MDH if kitchen staff are ill so that a sanitarian can work with the kitchen to implement additional prevention measures.
- Monitor for kitchen staff illnesses during the outbreak using the food service Employee Illness Screening Form.
- Exclude ill kitchen staff from work for 72 hours after diarrhea/vomiting have stopped.
- Clean and sanitize all kitchen and dining area surfaces with a product described above.
- Discontinue all self-service food/drinks including self-service foods using tongs or other serving utensils (e.g., salad bars, food sharing table). Have kitchen staff or other adults serve all food items.
RESOURCES
A copy of this toolkit packet is also available online: Outbreaks at Schools, Child Care, and Long-term Care Facilities (www.health.state.mn.us/divs/idepc/dtopics/foodborne/outbreak/facility/index.html)

FACT SHEETS
• Norovirus Fact Sheet (www.health.state.mn.us/divs/idepc/diseases/norovirus/noro.html)

POSTERS
• (1) Be A Germ-Buster...Wash Your Hands Poster (www.health.state.mn.us/handhygiene/wash/fsgermbuster.html) *available in 14 languages
• (2) Vomit Clean Up (www.health.state.mn.us/divs/idepc/dtopics/foodborne/vomitposter.pdf)

FURTHER READING
• MDH Hand Hygiene (www.health.state.mn.us/handhygiene/)
• CDC Vital Signs: Preventing Norovirus Outbreaks in Food Service Settings (www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/norovirus/index.html)
FAQ

Q: What if this outbreak is not caused by norovirus?
A: The interventions in this toolkit are effective at controlling outbreaks of similar diarrheal pathogens. MDH can provide additional guidance as needed.

Q: Can we use our regular cleaner(s)?
A: Probably not. You must use a sanitizer/disinfectant that specifically says that it is effective against norovirus on the label. If you have trouble finding an appropriate product, either use the bleach solution described in the CHECKLIST, or provide this list of EPA-approved products to your chemical supplier and have them order one for you: List G: EPA’s Registered Antimicrobial Products Effective Against Norovirus (www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-g-epas-registered-antimicrobial-products-effective-against-norovirus).

Q: Are hand sanitizers effective?
A: Most are not effective against norovirus. Check with your chemical supplier, or read the label carefully to make sure it lists effectivity against norovirus.

Q: Do we need to report this outbreak to anyone other than MDH?
A: No. MDH will notify your field epidemiologist and/or local health department as needed.

Q: Are there HIPPA or other privacy concerns with releasing student names to MDH?
A: No. MDH is not a HIPPA-covered entity. MDH has authority to undertake this investigation and collect private data under Minn. Stat. 144.05, subd. 1, 144.053, and Minn. Rules part 4605.7500. Private data held by MDH is protected under Minn. Stat. Section 144.658.

Q: How do we report an outbreak of flu/influenza?
A: Another unit at MDH works with influenza – please see School Health Personnel Influenza Information (www.health.state.mn.us/divs/idepc/diseases/flu/school/index.html) or call 1-877-676-5414.