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Cabarrus Health Alliance Encourages Everyone to Take Precautions Against Uptick in ‘Stomach Bugs’

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Kannapolis, N.C. – Cabarrus Health Alliance, January 26, 2024 – Public health officials in Cabarrus County are urging the public to be extra vigilant as Health Alliance staff are getting an increase in calls and concerns related to gastrointestinal (GI) illness. As cases of GI illnesses and norovirus rise in our region, it is crucial for everyone to stay informed and take necessary precautions to prevent further community spread.

While most people recover quickly from ‘stomach bugs,’ children, the elderly, and those who are immunocompromised could experience more serious problems. People should avoid visiting long term care facilities if they are ill.

“In 2023, we saw the highest level of GI illness and Norovirus during the month of March so we are asking our community to help us stay ahead of illness this year,” shared Dr. Easterday, Medical Director at CHA. “Most people will not need medical care and will not be tested for Norovirus but we assume that is what most people have if they are vomiting, have diarrhea, or nausea at this time of year.”

Recommendations for everyone:

- Stay home if you or a person in your household are sick. If you or a member of your household are experiencing symptoms such as vomiting, diarrhea, or fever, it is important to stay home for 48 hours **after** symptoms subside.
- Always connect with your medical provider if you are sick and symptoms are not improving.

Recommendations for businesses:

- Businesses with public spaces are strongly encouraged to enhance their disinfection protocols. Routine cleaning of high-touch surfaces can significantly reduce the risk of transmission of Norovirus and similar GI illnesses.
- Managers should exclude employees from coming into the workspace when experiencing GI symptoms and they should not return until 48 **after** symptoms end.

Recommendations for medical providers:

- Providers are encouraged to test for Norovirus if individuals present with GI symptoms.

Anyone who has questions or concerns regarding GI illness and/or prevention strategies may call the Cabarrus Health Information line: 704-920-1213. A CHA staff member will be in touch with you within 24 hours.

What is Norovirus?

Noroviruses are a group of viruses that cause acute gastroenteritis in humans. The symptoms of Norovirus infection include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, cramping and low-grade fever. Norovirus can spread easily from one person to another through tiny droplets of material in the air. It spreads most quickly in small spaces such as daycares, schools, and assisted living facilities. Symptoms usually last between 24 and 60 hours.

Prevention and Treatment

There is no vaccine to prevent norovirus and no drug to treat it. Antibiotics will not help because they do not work on viruses. It's important to drink plenty of liquids to replace fluid loss and prevent dehydration. If you or someone you are caring for is dehydrated, call your doctor.

There are five steps to help **prevent** norovirus:

- 1) Good hand washing is the best way to prevent getting sick. Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds after using the toilet and changing diapers and before eating, preparing or handling food. Use alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water is not available.
- 2) Wash fruits and vegetables and cook seafood thoroughly.
- 3) When you are sick, do not prepare food or care for others: You should not prepare food for others or provide healthcare while you are sick and for at least 2 to 3 days after you recover. This also applies to sick workers in schools, daycares, and other places where they may expose people to norovirus.

- 4) Get rid of possible germs in your home by cleaning with a mixture of bleach and water. For disinfecting, use an unopened bottle of chlorine bleach. Discard unused portions. For non-porous surfaces such as tile floors, countertops, sinks, etc.: a third (1/3) cup of bleach in 1 gallon of water.

For porous surfaces such as wooden floors: one and two-thirds cups of bleach in 1 gallon of water. Leave bleach solution on the surface for 10 to 20 minutes, and then rinse the area with clean water. After the disinfection process is complete, close off the area, if possible, for at least one hour. If there are windows, air out the area. Wash and sanitize hands thoroughly.

****Chlorine bleach should always be handled with care. It can destroy the color of fabrics and be harmful if not handled properly. Use in well-ventilated areas.**

- 5) Wash laundry thoroughly: Immediately remove and wash clothes or linens that may be contaminated with vomit or stool (feces).

For more information, visit CDC's Norovirus website at <https://www.cdc.gov/norovirus/>

About The Public Health Authority of Cabarrus County (Cabarrus Health Alliance)

The Public Health Authority of Cabarrus County (Cabarrus Health Alliance) is the provider of public health services for Cabarrus County.

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