

Public Health Update

October 2007

Increase in Gastrointestinal Illness in Local Child Care Centers

By Tiffany C. White, PhD

Tri-County Health Department (TCHD) has recently observed a marked increase in outbreaks of gastrointestinal illness in local child care centers. Furthermore, at least one of these child care centers has experienced multiple outbreaks. Laboratory testing of stool samples from ill students and staff indicated norovirus as the causative agent in the majority of the outbreaks.

Noroviruses (also known as Norwalk-like viruses, caliciviruses, and small round structured viruses) cause acute gastroenteritis. Acute-onset vomiting, watery non-bloody diarrhea, abdominal cramping and nausea are the most common symptoms. The virus has a low infectious dose (< 100 viral particles), which allows for easy spread. Transmission is primarily person-to-person via the fecal-oral route and a food handler can contaminate food if they have the virus on their hands. Transmission through aerosolized vomitus, as well as fomite transmission, may also occur. Shedding of norovirus begins with onset of symptoms, and infected persons can be contagious for up to 72 hours **after** symptoms have stopped. Humans are the only known reservoir for these viruses. Norovirus may account for more than 90% of gastroenteritis outbreaks not caused by bacteria or toxins. Outbreaks of norovirus have occurred in many different settings, including restaurants, schools, camps, cruise ships, vacation settings, swimming pools, hospitals and long-term care facilities.

What can Health Care Providers Do?

TCHD feels it is important for physicians and health departments to relay a consistent message and recommendations to patients suspected of having norovirus. As a control measure during a norovirus outbreak in a child care center, Tri-County Health Department recommends the following for all staff and students with diarrhea or vomiting:

- Symptomatic staff and students should be isolated immediately and sent home.
- Ill staff and students should not return to the childcare center until **48 hours after** symptoms of vomiting or diarrhea have stopped.

When a child is seen in your office with symptoms consistent with norovirus or viral gastroenteritis, please ask parents if their child attends any type of child care setting. Since persons with norovirus can be contagious after symptoms stop, TCHD asks that you encourage parents to keep their children out of child care settings for **at least 48 hours after** symptoms of vomiting or diarrhea resolve, **even if the child is otherwise feeling fine**. This recommendation will help protect well children and staff in child care settings.



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Richard L. Vogt, M.D., Executive Director

Also, it is important to remind parents of strategies to prevent the spread of norovirus to other family members in their homes. These strategies include the following:

- Wash your hands frequently, after using the restroom, diaper changing or toilet training and especially before eating or preparing food.
- Avoid preparing and serving food if you are ill with a gastrointestinal illness.
- Use a bleach-based household cleaner to thoroughly clean and disinfect contaminated surfaces immediately after an episode of illness.
- Using hot water and soap, immediately wash clothing or linens that may be contaminated after an episode of illness
- Immediately flush or remove any stool or vomitus in toilets or sinks. Also, make sure that areas surrounding the toilet or sink are kept clean, using bleach-based household cleaners.

More information on Norovirus and viral gastroenteritis can be found at:

http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/submenus/sub_norwalk.htm

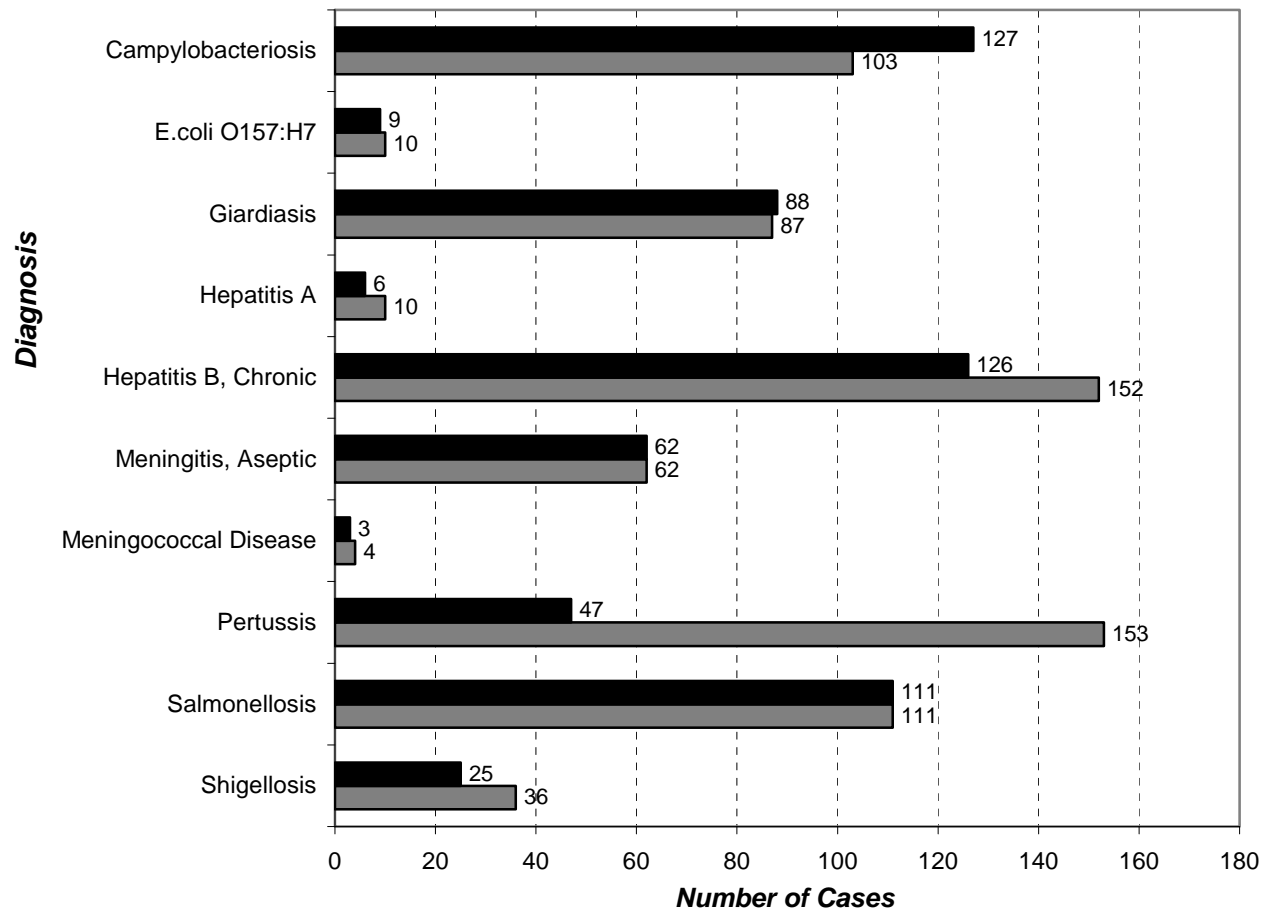
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Fax: (303) 782-0338

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Selected Diseases by Date of Report Adams, Arapahoe, and Douglas Counties 2007 Year-to-date Through September



■ 5-YR Median YTD ■ 2007 YTD

