

# IPC Advice Bulletin for staff providing Domiciliary Care (Care at Home) Issue No. 03 – Dec 2016

## Viral Gastroenteritis Alert

To support care staff, here is some information on good infection prevention and control (IPC) practice.

Numerous Hospitals and Care Homes across the UK have recently been affected by closures due to viral gastroenteritis. Predictions are that it could be one of the worst years for people getting diarrhoea and vomiting, especially over Christmas and the winter months. The following advice will help you care for service users who have symptoms and help prevent you from becoming ill.

### What is Viral Gastroenteritis?

Norovirus is the most common cause of viral gastroenteritis and around 1 million people are affected in the UK every year. People often refer to it as 'gastric flu' or 'winter vomiting'. Norovirus is highly infectious and can easily spread from person-to-person.

### What are the symptoms?

- Sudden onset of diarrhoea and or vomiting, vomiting can be projectile (forceful).
- Nausea.
- Abdominal/stomach cramps.
- Headache, low grade fever.

Symptoms start 12-48 hours after being infected by the virus. Most people feel better within 48 hours; however, elderly people with existing long-term illnesses may have symptoms for longer.

### How is it spread?

The virus is present in an affected person's diarrhoea or vomit (D&V). A person is infected after swallowing the virus, this usually happens by transferring the virus from hand-to-mouth, e.g., putting your fingers in your mouth when eating.

Can be spread by:

- contaminated hands of service users and staff
- contaminated surfaces and equipment
- contaminated food.

### What advice should you give a service user?

If a service user has unexplained diarrhoea and or vomiting, advise them of the following control measures to prevent the spread to others:

- stay at home and do not use communal facilities in independent living accommodation
- do not visit friends, relatives, hospitals or care homes until free from symptoms for 48 hours
- rest and drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration
- viral gastroenteritis does not require treatment. Avoid going to your GP as this may spread the virus to others. However, if concerned call your GP or NHS 111



- wash hands thoroughly after each episode of diarrhoea and vomiting, after using the toilet and before meals. Moist detergent hand wipes can be used.
- if possible, avoid handling and preparing food for other people until free from symptoms for 48 hours
- disinfect toilets and the surrounding area after use with household bleach as per manufacturer's instructions
- linen and clothing should be washed on the highest temperature stated on the washing label.



### What should staff do to prevent getting viral gastroenteritis?

- Where possible, consider alternative arrangements for providing care for a service user with viral gastroenteritis, such as a family member. If this is not possible, the service user should be scheduled as the last or only person on the staff member's shift.
- Hand washing is essential when caring for a service user who has symptoms of D&V. Use liquid soap and warm running water and dry hands with paper towels, e.g., kitchen roll. Alcohol handrubs are **not** effective at killing the virus so should not be used.
- Hands should be washed:
  - ◊ after removing gloves and an apron
  - ◊ before leaving a service users home
  - ◊ before eating or drinking.
- Wear disposable aprons and gloves.
- When removing apron and gloves, always remove gloves first, then the apron.
- Depending on the care package, carry out or give advice on the cleaning and disinfection of the toilet, commode and surrounding environment and commonly touched surfaces such as door handles, using household bleach at a dilution of 10mls in a litre of water.
- Encourage service users to wash their hands after using the toilet and before meals.
- An Infection Prevention and Control Policy on Viral Gastroenteritis can be downloaded from our website [www.infectionpreventioncontrol.co.uk](http://www.infectionpreventioncontrol.co.uk), this provides further advice and guidance.



### What should staff do if they develop symptoms?

- Remain off work until symptom free for 48 hours. If symptoms develop whilst at work, you should not remain on duty.
- Avoid going to your GP as this may spread the virus to others, stay at home, rest and drink plenty of fluids.