

本署檔號 Our Ref. : (200) in DH/CDB/8/19/1
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22 March 2023

Dear Principals / Persons-in-charge,

Vigilance against acute gastroenteritis

I would like to draw your attention to the latest situation of acute gastroenteritis (AGE) and enlist your support in the prevention of the disease.

The surveillance data of the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health showed recent increase in the activity of AGE, from two in the week ending 25 February to seven last week (ending March 18) and another seven outbreaks had been reported in the past three days of this week. In addition, the sentinel surveillance based at child care centres/ kindergartens (CCC/KG) also recorded corresponding increase in AGE activity last week.

AGE is usually caused by norovirus or rotavirus infection. Symptoms include nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, abdominal pain, fever and malaise. These viruses can be transmitted by consumption of contaminated food, contact with the vomitus or excreta of the infected persons, contaminated objects, and aerosol spread with contaminated droplets of splashed vomitus. They are highly infectious and may result in outbreaks that are difficult to control. AGE outbreaks may occur throughout the year although they are relatively more common in winter months.

To prevent outbreaks of viral gastroenteritis, strict personal, food and environmental hygiene with particular attention to handling of vomitus and faecal matter are very important. I would recommend you to take the following steps:

1. Remind children/students and staff to maintain personal hygiene especially proper hand-washing with liquid soap before meals and after going to the toilet;
2. Remind children/students and staff and their family to maintain proper food hygiene. Ensure all food is adequately cooked especially high-risk food like shellfish;
3. Train staff on the proper management and disinfection of the environment after vomiting incidents:
 - Keep children/students away from the area during the cleaning process.
 - Wear gloves and a mask while removing the vomitus.
 - Use disposable towels to wipe away all the vomitus from outside inward, before applying diluted bleach (1 in 49) to the surface and the neighbouring area (e.g. within 2 metres of the vomitus).
 - Leave bleach on the soiled surface for 15-30 minutes to allow time for the bleach to inactivate viruses before rinsing the surface with water and mop dry.



- Floor mops should not be used for cleaning the vomitus.
 - Wash hands thoroughly afterwards.
4. Keep the mouthpiece and protective guard of drinking fountains free from contamination with oral and respiratory secretions. Advise staff/students/children on the following when using drinking fountains:
 - Children using the fountain should not come in direct contact with the orifice guard.
 - Young children are discouraged from drinking directly from the drinking fountain. Individual drinking cups should be used.
 - When individual disposable cups are supplied by schools, there shall be a suitable container for the unused cups and also a receptacle with cover for disposing of the used cups.
 - Expectorating upon the drinking fountain is prohibited.
 5. Sick staff, especially the food-handlers, should take sick leave to prevent the spread of disease.
 6. Keep affected children and staff away from schools/centres until their diarrhoea or vomiting has subsided for at least 2 days or as advised by the doctor.

As schools, daycare and residential institutions are at risk of communicable disease outbreak, I would urge you to keep vigilance against communicable diseases. The ***“Guidelines on Prevention of Communicable Diseases in Schools / Kindergartens / Kindergartens-cum-Child Care Centres / Child Care Centres”*** contains practical information and control measures on prevention of communicable diseases and is available at: <http://www.chp.gov.hk/en/content/9/460/24522.html>.

If you notice an increase in number of staff/students/children with symptoms of AGE, please inform the Central Notification Office of the CHP as early as possible (Fax: 2477 2770; Tel: 2477 2772; Email: diseases@dh.gov.hk) so that prompt investigation and control measures can be initiated accordingly.

Thank you for your unfailing support in prevention and control of communicable diseases.

Yours faithfully,



(Dr SK CHUANG)
for Controller, Centre for Health Protection
Department of Health