

**Feb. 24, 2010**

**Media Contact:** Dianne Shipley, 941-861-2852; cell 941-302-1058, [Dianne\\_Shipley@doh.state.fl.us](mailto:Dianne_Shipley@doh.state.fl.us)

## Local health officials report increase in norovirus illness

The Sarasota County Health Department has received numerous reports of norovirus illness, a gastrointestinal disease, common in settings where people are in close physical contact.

“Currently, many of our surveillance systems show increasing amounts of norovirus, also known as “winter vomiting disease”, in daycare facilities, long-term care facilities, hospital emergency rooms and school health rooms,” said Michael Drennon, MSPH, an epidemiologist with the Sarasota County Health Department.

The symptoms commonly associated with the norovirus illness are nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and stomach cramps. The virus is not related to the flu which is a respiratory illness. Norovirus cannot be treated with antibiotics, and usually takes one to two days to run its course. Those who are ill should prevent dehydration by drinking plenty of fluids. Dehydration is usually more of a problem among the very young, the elderly, and people with other illnesses. Individuals should seek medical advice if they have a decrease in urination, a dry mouth and throat, and feel dizzy when standing up. A dehydrated child may also cry with few or no tears and be unusually sleepy or fussy.

Those with symptoms of the norovirus illness are contagious from the moment they begin feeling ill and up to at least three days after they recover.

The virus is easily spread from person to person by touching surfaces or objects contaminated with the norovirus illness then putting hand to mouth, or by having direct contact with another person who is infected and showing symptoms (for example, when caring for someone with the illness, or sharing food, drink, or eating utensils with someone who is ill). It is also spread by eating food or drinking liquids that are contaminated with norovirus, usually after being handled by someone who has the illness.

To prevent norovirus, local health officials advise:

- Keep those who are ill with symptoms home and isolated from other family members.
- Stay home from work and do not send children who are ill to school until three days after symptoms subside.
- Increase hand washing with soap and warm water especially before eating and after using the restroom. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are not completely effective against the norovirus illness.
- Increase the cleaning of surfaces in bathrooms, kitchens, eating areas, and other high touch or contaminated surfaces. Surfaces should be cleaned with a two percent bleach solution (one-third cup bleach in one gallon of water) or other effective cleaner.

For additional information, visit [www.sarasotahealth.org](http://www.sarasotahealth.org) or call 941-861-2873.

-end-