Norovirus on the Rise

There has been an increase in the number of reported Norovirus/gastrointestinal outbreaks in Santa Barbara County over the past month, which is expected this time of year. Affected facilities include adult congregate living, schools and skilled nursing facilities. Norovirus outbreaks are caused by a group of related viruses that account for more than 90 percent of gastrointestinal illness outbreaks in the United States each year. Noroviruses can be found in stool and vomit and are highly contagious. They are known for sweeping through schools, office buildings and other close quarters, and infecting a large number of people.

Symptoms of Norovirus illness usually begin about 24 to 48 hours after close exposure to Norovirus and can appear as early as 12 hours after exposure and include:

- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Abdominal cramps
- Low grade fever or none at all

Symptoms
People may feel very sick and vomit multiple times and/or have many loose stools a day. Most people get better within 1 or 2 days, and they have no long-term health effects related to their illness. However, shedding of the virus may continue for 1-2 weeks. At times, affected individuals, usually the very young and elderly may become dehydrated as they are unable to drink enough liquids to replace the liquids they lost because of vomiting and diarrhea.

Prevention
The spread of Norovirus can be prevented by practicing proper hand hygiene. Important strategies include washing hands with soap and water, especially after using the toilet and changing diapers and always before eating and preparing or handling food.

For more information on Norovirus, please visit www.cdc.gov and www.sbcphd.org/dcp

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