



Public Health
England

Reducing the spread of diarrhoea and vomiting in schools

North East Resource Pack

About Public Health England

Public Health England exists to protect and improve the nation's health and wellbeing, and reduce health inequalities. It does this through world-class science, knowledge and intelligence, advocacy, partnerships and the delivery of specialist public health services. PHE is an operationally autonomous executive agency of the Department of Health.

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Published May 2015.

Contents

Contents	3
Diarrhoea and vomiting: The basics	4
Hand washing advice	5
Hand washing poster	7
Food Safety	9
Diarrhoea and vomiting: Guidelines for environmental cleaning	10
Reducing the spread of diarrhoea and/or vomiting: Advice for Parents	12
Contacts	13

Diarrhoea and vomiting: the basics

The germs that cause diarrhoea and/or vomiting can pass from one person to another, when excreted in the faeces or vomit of the infected person.

Hands often become contaminated allowing spread to the general environment by touching taps, toys, surfaces, objects and food.

Norovirus is the most common cause of diarrhoea and/or vomiting and can be easily spread through contact with an infected person, by consuming contaminated food or water or by contact with contaminated surfaces or objects.

Not all diarrhoea or vomiting is caused by Norovirus, therefore if you have any concerns about a child or staff member they should be advised to see a health professional.

What precautions should you take to stop the spread of diarrhoea and/or vomiting in the school?

1. All children and staff should be aware of how and when **to wash their hands** (see page 5). Good hand hygiene is crucial to prevent further spread of bugs.
2. **Appropriate cleaning** of the affected area should take place immediately (see page 9).
3. If a child or staff member has diarrhoea and/or vomiting in the school they should be **isolated immediately** and collected (by an appropriate adult) or sent home as soon as possible to prevent any spread of illness to others.
4. The affected person/child should not return to the school until they have **NOT had diarrhoea or vomiting for 48 hours/ two whole days**.
5. Staff should be on the look out for further children/staff with diarrhoea and/or vomiting symptoms and **discuss a rise in numbers** with the North East Health Protection Team (see page 12).
6. In some instances it may be wise to **stop sand/water/food “messy” play**, especially if the illness is affecting younger children, until the number of children absent has settled back down to background norm.
7. Food poisoning usually results in diarrhoea and vomiting and children can be more seriously affected than adults. **Good food and kitchen hygiene practices are therefore crucial** in the school setting; see page 8, or visit www.food.gov.uk for more detailed information.

Hand washing advice

Your hands can easily spread bacteria and viruses; it is important to always wash your hands thoroughly with soap and warm water and then dry them completely.

Regular emphasis should be placed on hand washing at each of these times:

- After using the toilet
- Before and after changing nappies
- Before starting to prepare or handle food
- After touching raw meat including poultry
- Before eating food
- After touching the bin or laundry
- After touching any animals including pets.

It is recommended that hand washing facilities include:

- Warm running water
- Liquid soap
- Single use paper towels.

The use of bar soap and terry towels can increase the transmission of germs, especially in an outbreak situation and therefore **should not** be used.

Alcohol gel **should not** be used as an alternative to washing your hands with soap and water as it is not effective against some bugs which can cause diarrhoea and vomiting. It is useful **in addition to** handwashing if there is illness in the school.



Wet



Soap



Wash



Rinse



Dry

Stop germs spreading.
The power is in your hands.

Have you washed your germs away? Wash your hands.

Food Safety

Good food and kitchen hygiene are essential in the school as children are a vulnerable group, which means they can be more seriously affected by food poisoning than adults. Food poisoning usually results in diarrhoea and vomiting but can also cause stomach cramps, nausea and fever. Sometimes food poisoning can lead to very serious illness such as infection with E.coli 0157, campylobacter and salmonella.

The germs from contaminated food (unwashed fruit and vegetables or undercooked meat, fish and eggs for example) spread easily from person to person via food, unwashed hands and contaminated surfaces (chopping boards, door knobs, taps).

A Food Safety Management System (FSMS) covering procedures and training should be in place. This should be documented and followed by all staff. For further information contact your local authority Environmental Health department.

The Food Standards Agency outlines 4Cs Kitchen Check tips to food safety:

Cleaning:

- Hands are one of the main ways in which germs are spread
- Wash hands with soap and warm water, then dry them thoroughly (see page 4)
- Food businesses should use disposable cloths as dirty, damp cloths are the perfect place for bacteria to breed
- Wash oven gloves regularly.

Cross contamination:

- Occurs when harmful germs are spread between food, surfaces and equipment. Prevent this by removing clutter and washing worktops before and after cooking
- Use a separate chopping board for preparing raw and ready to eat foods
- Ensure chopping boards and other utensils are washed in hot soapy water.

Chilling:

- Make sure your fridge is set below 5°C – use a fridge thermometer
- FSMS should include documented temperature controls
- Don't overfill your fridge, allow air to circulate and maintain the set temperature
- Store raw meat and poultry at the bottom of the fridge
- Properly wrap or cover it to avoid raw juices contaminating other foods.

Cooking:

- Cook food thoroughly until it is steaming hot in the middle or has achieved a core temp of 75°C and held that temperature for a min of 30 seconds; this will kill any harmful bacteria that may be present
- Reheated food should be heated above 75°C to kill any germs.

If you provide meals, snacks or drinks for the children in your school, or even just reheat or cut up food provided by a parent, you must comply with the Food Hygiene Regulations (and its amendments) and register your premises as a food business with your **local Environmental Health Department**. Visit www.food.gov.uk for more detailed information. **Diarrhoea and vomiting: Guidelines for environmental cleaning**

Diarrhoea and vomiting: Guidelines for environmental cleaning

1 General Environment

- Floors, walls, kitchens, toilet areas, furniture, toys and equipment should be kept physically clean and dust free through a regular cleaning schedule which the school should already have in place.
- Regular cleaning and damp dusting: single use disposable cloth, neutral detergent and warm water, is recommended.
- Larger areas e.g. floors may be allowed to air dry, after cleaning providing associated health and safety risks are assessed, for slips for example.
- Where there is obvious contamination with solid matter, before any disinfection process is undertaken, it is important to remove any solids and dispose of them into an agreed appropriate waste system.

2 Cleaning Equipment

- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) should be used during the cleaning process. PPE includes protective gloves and aprons.
- Brooms re-disperse dust and bacteria into the air and therefore, should not be used routinely; vacuum cleaners or dust-attracting mops are suitable.
- Non-disposable mop heads should be laundered using a hot wash, preferably with a disinfection cycle then re-rinse and allow the mop head to dry and store inverted.
- Any buckets used should be washed, rinsed and dried and then stored inverted.
- Cloths used in food preparation areas should be kept separate from those used in toilet areas. Cloths should be individually colour coded for different areas.

3 Cleaning up of vomit and faeces

- Where a room is contaminated with vomit or faeces, remove people from the area as soon as practically possible.
- The room should then not be used over the next 24 hour period if possible.
- Any room where there has been contamination with vomit or faeces should be disinfected with particular attention to objects soiled and/ or frequently handled and contact surfaces such as taps, door handles, toilet and bath rails, flush handles and telephones.

4 Method for removing vomit and/or faeces

- Soak up excess fluid using specific chemicals for this purpose OR disposable absorbent paper towels. Staff must wear appropriate PPE.
- Remove solid matter using a dustpan or shovel that can then be appropriately decontaminated or cardboard that can be disposed of.

- Transfer solid matter into a leak proof plastic bag then into a second leak proof plastic bag, ensuring each bag is knotted for closure.
- Place the bags in a secure area for collection.
- During a outbreak of a serious infection (ie E. coli O157), please discuss with the Health Protection Team about the possible need for disposal into clinical waste.
- Once solids are removed, clean the room/area with neutral detergent and warm water and dry.
- All items should then be disinfected with a bleach based solution (see below) using separate, disposable cloths for each room/area.

5 Soft Furnishings

- Where possible soft furnishings should be initially cleaned as above then steam cleaned (if heat stable) or as a minimum washed and dried using industrial machines.

6 Cleaning and disinfection solution

- Detergent is a cleaning agent that removes dirt. Disinfection is a process using a bleach based solution (hypochlorite) to kill germs on surfaces.
- The recommended level of hypochlorite solutions is 1000ppm (0.1%) chlorine (bleach) solution: 0.1% is 1 part of bleach in 1000 parts water; this is equivalent to 10ml bleach to 10 litres of water.

7 During an outbreak

- The number of times routine cleaning is undertaken should be increased.
- Proper use of PPE, cleaning products/equipment, as above, will reduce the risk of cross infection from ill to well people.
- Steam cleaning of soft furnishings, including carpets, is advised
- Thorough airing of rooms is helpful.
- Stop sand/water/food “messy” play during an outbreak.

NOTE: Employers and employees must follow the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) Regulations, HMSO 1999 in relation to these guidelines. For further info contact Environmental Health or www.hse.go.uk

Reducing the spread of diarrhoea and/or vomiting: Advice for parents

What is it?

- Vomiting is easily recognised, but diarrhoea can be less easy to identify.
- Diarrhoea is the passage of more than one abnormally loose bowel motion in 24 hours. The faeces/motion has no solid shape and will take the shape of any container into which it is put.

What causes it?

- The most common cause is a bug called norovirus, which requires no treatment. The diarrhoea and/or vomiting usually lasts 1 - 2 days.
- Other bugs such as salmonella, cryptosporidium, campylobacter or E.coli O157 can also cause diarrhoea and/or vomiting and can spread from one person to another. These can cause more serious illness.

What should I do?

- Do not send your child to school if they have diarrhoea or vomiting. If your child is unwell with diarrhoea and/or vomiting, pay special attention to hand hygiene in the home.
- If the diarrhoea and/or vomiting is mild, let the illness run its course and give your child plenty of fluids (sips) to prevent dehydration.
- If your child is unusually sleepy, isn't improving after a couple of days, won't take fluids or has other symptoms, such as blood in their diarrhoea, an unusual rash, headache, neck stiffness or difficulty breathing, contact your GP urgently or take your child to hospital.

How are diarrhoea and /or vomiting spread?

- The germs are shed in the vomit and faeces (motions) of those infected and can be spread to other places (taps, other people, food and so on) via hands.
- Germs pass from person to person and through the environment or commonly touched items which have the germs on them.
- Thorough cleaning of the environment/commonly touched items and **not** sharing towels or utensils is very important to stop the spread of infection.

How can it be prevented?

- Good hand washing is one of the most important ways to prevent the spread of germs. This applies to the child who is ill and anyone looking after them.
- Hands should always be washed using warm water and liquid soap after using the toilet, before eating or handling food and after cleaning up a mess (vomit, faeces or urine) or changing nappies.
- Good hand hygiene is crucial to prevent further spread to others.
- If possible, each household member should have a separate towel for their own personal use.

Exclusion

- If your child has diarrhoea and/or vomiting, keep them off school until they have not had any symptoms for 48 hours.
- If your child has been to see the GP and you know what the cause of the illness is, please let the school know as soon as possible as it may help prevent further cases.
- Keep your child away from other children and people who are particularly vulnerable (eg the elderly and those with chronic illnesses) until they have not had symptoms for 48 hours.
- Anyone who has been in contact with someone with vomiting and/or diarrhoea but does not have symptoms themselves, may attend school as normal.

North East PHE Health Protection Team

When to call the Health Protection Team:

- If you think you have an outbreak (two or more staff or children with the same illness at around the same time)
- If you have any concerns or questions regarding infectious diseases
- You want infection control advice about preventing the spread of infectious diseases.

Useful information to give the Health Protection Team:

- The names of the children and/or staff who are ill
- Which class or room they are in
- What symptoms they have
- The date each person fell ill or when symptoms were first noticed
- The date they last attended school
- Any recent relevant activities such as farm visits, foreign travel, animals in the school
- Who you have informed about the possible outbreak.

Contact details

PHE/Health Protection

North East Public Health England Centre
Health Protection Team
Floor 2 Citygate, Gallowgate,
Newcastle upon Tyne,
NE1 4WH
Tel: 0300 303 8596 option 1
Fax: 0191 2212584
www.gov.uk/phe

You can also contact your local environmental health department for information on this subject.