



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Stomach Illness on the Rise in Kent County

GRAND RAPIDS – Reports of stomach illness to the Kent County Health Department have health officials reminding everyone to practice good hygiene to prevent the further spread of sickness. For the week ending March 8, 2014, gastrointestinal illness (vomiting and/or diarrhea) complaints are being reported to local medical emergency departments at a rate that is higher (16.9%) than the four year average for this time of year (14.9%).

Communicable Disease staff at KCHD has been in contact with local emergency departments as well as people impacted by the illness. The increase also prompted an alert, sent to food establishments, to be diligent regarding the health and hygiene of their food employees; to use proper cleaning procedures and reinforce proper protocol if someone on their staff or in their facility is ill. If you work in the food service industry, in a cafeteria, or in a restaurant, and you are ill, stay home until you recover. The Michigan Food Code requires food employees to be symptom-free from diarrhea or vomiting for a minimum of 24 hours before returning to work. Many of the complaints exhibit symptoms consistent with norovirus infection, a highly contagious, easily transmitted illness.

“If you or someone in your family is suffering from vomiting or diarrhea, avoid contact with those who are not ill,” said Adam London, Health Officer of the Kent County Health Department. “Although a surface may not be visibly soiled, the virus can live on this surface for long periods of time if not properly cleaned.”

If possible, infected individuals should use one bathroom while uninfected individuals use another. The infected person should use disposable paper towel to dry their hands after washing, to prevent the virus from spreading. Be sure to clean that bathroom (and any other potentially contaminated areas) with a chlorine bleach solution, mixing ¼ cup of bleach with one gallon of water.

Other tips:

1. Wash hands before eating, after using the bathroom, and before, during and after preparing food:
 - Rub your hands together to lather the soap, and be sure to really scrub the backs of your hands, between your fingers, and under your nails.
 - Continue rubbing your hands for at least 20 seconds.
 - Rinse your hands well under running water.
 - Dry your hands using a paper towel or air dry them.
 - After drying, use another clean paper towel to open the door, and then dispose of it.

(more)

KCHD has been in the business of providing health services to Kent County since 1931. The Health Department is home to nearly 260 employees including public health nurses, sanitarians, health educators, technicians, public health administrators, and specialized staff at the Kent County Animal Shelter. The Health Department operates one main clinic and four satellite clinics located in Wyoming, Kentwood, Rockford, and Grand Rapids. To learn more about KCHD services, visit www.accesskent.com/health.

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2. If you have been suffering from vomiting or diarrhea, remain at home until symptoms subside.
3. Don't prepare food for anyone else until you haven't had symptoms for 24 hours or more.
4. If sharing food, don't use bare hands when handling foods, and use utensils to transfer food from container to plate.

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