

# Tips for Investigating a Norovirus Outbreak in an Emergency Shelter

*During an emergency, there are often additional challenges in investigating outbreaks. It is important to use the limited resources available to identify the source and slow the spread as quickly as possible.*



Assemble a team to investigate the outbreak, and make sure all partners have been notified. This includes: Local Communicable Disease, Local Environmental Health Specialist, State Communicable Disease, State Environmental Health, Health Director, Public Information Officer, and Preparedness Coordinator.



Proper clean up of vomit and diarrhea events is vital to reducing outbreaks in emergency shelter situations. Ensure proper vomit cleanup plans are being used. Using absorbent material, like kitty litter on vomit in public areas to reduce aerosols. Ensure proper disinfectant is being used for cleanup (Bleach is recommended - 1 cup of regular 5.25% bleach in one gallon of water). Carpets or other soft surfaces can be steam cleaned to 158° F for 5 minutes.



It is important to collect complete information during interviews of shelter residents since they may not have regular methods of contact available. Collect as much contact information as possible and keep complete records. Communicate regularly with the shelter manager regarding new cases.



Implement control measures as quickly as possible to help limit the spread of the outbreak. Potential control measures include:

- Isolate sick individuals quickly in dedicated area with easily cleanable floors, a separate restroom, and a handwashing sink
- Screen new shelter arrivals for symptoms of norovirus, and do not admit to general population if they have experienced vomiting or diarrhea within the last 48 hours.
- Regularly clean and disinfect common touch surfaces
- Discourage food and beverage self service areas



Make regular visits to shelter, or contact with shelter manager to check on the status of the outbreak and the control measures. Provide consistent communication with partners at state and local level, and within emergency management to ensure that everyone is aware of the progress of the outbreak investigation. Communicate norovirus prevention information to shelter residents and the public, including proper handwashing technique and when handwashing is needed. Continue surveillance efforts within the shelter until the outbreak is considered over.



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