

December 2008

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TWO DISEASES YOU DON'T WANT TO GET FOR THE HOLIDAYS!

Norovirus

Noroviruses are common causes of viral gastroenteritis and are involved in outbreaks in families, schools and day cares, long term care facilities, and cruise ships. At least 50% of foodborne outbreaks are thought to be due to noroviruses and the CDC estimates that 64,000 episodes of diarrhea requiring hospitalization and 900,000 clinic visits among children occur each year due to noroviruses in industrialized countries (*Source EID 2008;14:1224-1231*).

Transmission: Noroviruses are highly contagious and even minute amounts of infected fecal matter or aerosolized vomitus can transmit the infection. People can become infected with noroviruses by:

- touching contaminated surfaces or objects, and then placing their hand in their mouth;
- having direct contact with another person who is infected; OR
- eating food or drinking liquids that are contaminated with norovirus.

Once infected, people can shed virus for weeks, even though symptoms usually resolve after a few days.

Diagnosis is usually clinical, based on symptoms of watery diarrhea and/or vomiting consistent with a viral gastroenteritis. Specific testing for norovirus is not usually done, although stool tests for norovirus are commercially available in some laboratories. Stool testing to rule out other causes of gastroenteritis may be indicated, such as stool culture for enteric bacterial pathogens, antigen testing for rotavirus, or examination stains for ova & parasites. During an outbreak or foodborne illness investigation, Orange County Public Health can facilitate norovirus testing. **Please report any outbreaks, clusters, or suspected foodborne illness (≥2 persons from separate households with same suspected source of illness) immediately to Orange County Public Health at 714-834-8180.**

Treatment consists of supportive care through replacing fluid losses and correcting electrolyte imbalances. No specific therapy for norovirus exists.

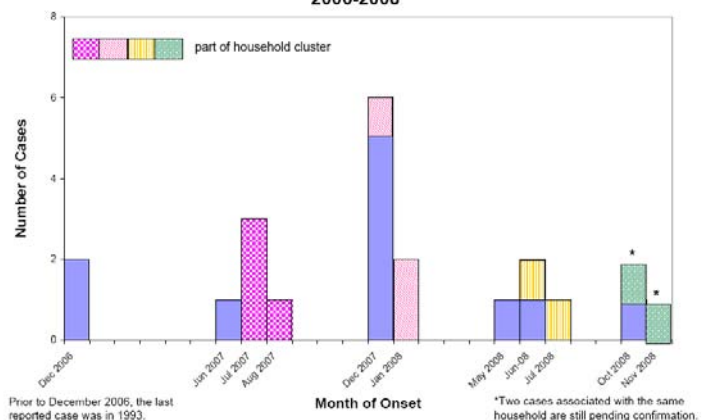
Prevention: No vaccine is available. Prevention of person-person transmission is mainly through hygiene (strict handwashing after using the toilet and before handling food), environmental disinfection and cleaning, and staying home and away from others while ill. Foodhandlers should not handle food for at least 72 hours after symptoms resolve; stricter precautions may be recommended during an outbreak.

Resources: See fact sheets on “Viral Gastroenteritis, including Norovirus Infections” and “Norovirus Infections, Questions and Answers about Cleaning and Disinfection”, at www.ochealthinfo.com/epi/viral.htm.

Typhus Update

Since our last typhus update, we have continued to receive reports of typhus cases in Orange County residents. Although typhus is typically seen in April through October, in Orange County we saw an increase in cases with onset in the winter months of 2006 and 2007 and expect a similar trend over the next few months. For more information about typhus, see <http://www.ochealthinfo.com/epi/typhus/index.htm> for our previous updates and newsletters.

Endemic Typhus Cases by Month of Onset, Orange County, 2006-2008



For comments or suggestions on the newsletter, contact Dr. Michele Cheung at (714) 834-8180. To receive this newsletter by email, please contact us at epi@ochca.com.