

**Health & Safety Guidance  
Children's Services Department**

**Outbreak Guidance for  
Schools & Nurseries.  
Diarrhoea & Vomiting Illness  
(gastroenteritis)**

<b>Review Date</b>	<b>Changes Required</b>	<b>Name &amp; Position</b>

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**Children's Services ISSUE 1  
Date: December 2017**

# Outbreak Guidance for Schools and Nurseries. Diarrhoea and Vomiting Illness (gastroenteritis)

## 1. Introduction

This guidance provides important information on outbreaks of diarrhoea and vomiting illness for schools and nurseries. Outbreaks can be caused by a range of bacteria or viruses, and it is important in every suspected outbreak to seek prompt expert advice. For the purposes of this policy an outbreak is classed as two or more linked cases or **more cases than you would usually expect**. The guidance aims are to ensure that staff are aware of their responsibility to act promptly if an outbreak of infection is suspected either in themselves or in the children.

- Don't wait for several cases of, for example, sickness and diarrhoea to occur before you report it.
- Put controls into place as prompt action could prevent a major outbreak of infection.
- Ensure that information about what to do in a suspected outbreak of infection is cascaded to key staff.

## 2. What is gastroenteritis?

Gastroenteritis is a very common condition that causes diarrhoea and vomiting. It's usually caused by a bacterial or viral stomach bug. It affects people of all ages, but is particularly common in young children. **Most cases in children are caused by a virus called rotavirus. Cases in adults are usually caused by norovirus (the "winter vomiting bug")** or bacterial food poisoning. Gastroenteritis can be very unpleasant, but is not usually serious although can be very disruptive when affecting individuals in schools and nurseries. Symptoms can be a combination of any of the following:

- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Abdominal pain
- Diarrhoea
- Temperature

It is sometimes associated with a flu-like illness e.g. aching joints and limbs.

### How is gastroenteritis spread?

The bugs that cause gastroenteritis can spread very easily from person to person by;

- **close contact with someone with gastroenteritis** – they may breathe out small particles of vomit
- **touching contaminated surfaces or objects**
- **eating contaminated food** – this can happen if an infected person doesn't wash their hands before handling food, or you eat food that has been in contact with contaminated surfaces or objects, or hasn't been stored and cooked at the correct temperatures (read more about the [causes of food poisoning](#))

A person with gastroenteritis is most infectious from when their symptoms start until 48 hours after all their symptoms have passed, although they may also be infectious for a short time before and after this.

**One vomit contains in excess of 30,000,000 viral particles: ingestion of between 10 or 100 viral particles may be enough to cause infection. To reduce the risk of transmission, it is essential that vomit and diarrhoea is cleaned up immediately.**

### **3. What you should do to reduce the risk of gastroenteritis – Staff** (including parent helpers, meal time assistants)

- If you have any of the above symptoms, do not come to work.
- Remain off work for **48 hours after the last symptom** (for example if the last symptom is at midday on Tuesday you should not return to school before midday on Thursday)
- You don't usually need to see your GP if you think you have gastroenteritis, however if you require further advice you can speak to NHS 111 or your GP.
- If symptoms commence during your working day – go straight home. The risk of spread is reduced considerably if contamination of the environment is reduced (see Appendix 1 for advice on cleaning).
- Inform the head teacher or manager of nursery.
- Staff should where possible supervise hand washing of pupils if possible.

**REMEMBER, being at work with symptoms poses a risk to children and your work colleagues.**

### **What you should do – Pupils**

- Children who become ill during the day should be sent home as soon as possible
- If the child cannot go home they should be kept away from other children in a safe area and monitored until alternative safe arrangements can be put in place
- Parents should be informed verbally that the child should remain off school for **48hours after the last symptom** (for example if the last symptom is at midday on Tuesday the child should not return to school before midday on Thursday).
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- You don't usually need to see your GP if you think your child has gastroenteritis, however if you concerned about your child or require further information you can visit [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk) or speak to NHS 111 or your GP.

### **4. In the event of a suspected outbreak at school:**

- The head teacher or nursery manager should inform Public Health England (PHE) 0344 225 4524 and the Health and Safety team 01629 536525. PHE will in turn notify any other relevant health professionals as required including local GP, local authority Environmental Health Officer.
- It is not usually necessary to close the premises during an outbreak of gastroenteritis unless the outbreak is impacting on the safe delivery of education ie due to levels of staff sickness. PHE and the Health and

Safety team will provide advice around management of the outbreak and school closure.

- Wear protective clothing if dealing with spillages - gloves and plastic aprons that can be disposed of immediately following use, if cleaning up soiling e.g. vomit. Please see Cleaning of Bodily Fluid Spillages Policy.
- Wash hands on removal of gloves and if hands become soiled (scrupulous hand hygiene should be maintained). Wash hands if in contact with an affected child and at other times after using the toilet, before eating or handling preparing food etc. (see Appendix 2)
- Ensure environmental soiling is cleaned up **immediately** in line with the Local Authority's Cleaning of Bodily fluids Guidance
- Ensure warm water, liquid soap and paper towels are available in the toilet facilities.
- Risk assess activities where cross contamination is a potential risk such as sand, play dough, water and cooking until the outbreak is over.
- Arrange for toilets and facilities to be clean more frequently during the day to reduce the risk of transmission of the infection via environmental contamination paying particular attention to high touch surfaces such as e.g. toilet seats, toilet flush and door handles. Increase cleaning of other high touch surfaces including door handles, door frames and table tops. Seek advice on the need to undertake deep cleaning during and following an outbreak, speak to PHE or contact the Health and Safety Section for advice.
- Staff or children who become ill during the day should be sent home as soon as possible and if possible kept away from other children.
- Consider providing parents with information via newsletters or web sites around the recognition and management of gastroenteritis. Parents can be signposted to information on NHS choices at <http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/gastroenteritis/Pages/Introduction.aspx#transmission>
- The head teacher/nursery manager may be advised by the PHE to send out a letter providing parents with further information see appendix 2 sample letter.

During an outbreak the PHE may contact the school regularly to collect information about new cases. Please ensure that the information is documented on the outbreak form (Appendix 3) and is easily located.

In the event of school closure please ensure the Health and Safety Section and PHE have all appropriate emergency contact details for the school.

## **5. Some commonly asked questions about outbreaks in schools/nurseries**

*How do we know if it is viral or bacterial in nature?*

Informing the PHE at the start of an outbreak will enable them to assess the likely nature of the outbreak. The following information is important: - symptoms, numbers affected, timescales, dates of onset of illness, duration of illness in affected individuals. (We do understand that this information may be difficult to collect and may be incomplete.)

If it is thought to be related to food handlers/food then the local environmental health officer at your council will provide advice regarding appropriate actions.

*What happens when a child vomits in the food hall?*

If possible the child should be sent home as soon as possible. Guidance on the safe cleaning of bodily fluids should be followed. Any vomit should be cleaned up immediately and disposed of into a plastic bag and secured and disposed of safely. Under no circumstances should vomit go into the food preparation area as this could pose a threat of further transmission if the environment becomes contaminated. Any children in the immediate vicinity of the vomiting should be offered alternative food stuffs, as the likelihood is that their food will have been contaminated by aerosol droplets, and they should wash their hands.

*Under what circumstances would the school/nursery need to be closed?*

It is not usually necessary to close premises during an outbreak of gastroenteritis, unless the outbreak is impacting on the safe delivery of education ie due to levels of staff sickness. PHE and Health and Safety team will be able to provide advice around management of the outbreak and school closure. If it is advised that the school is closed (due to staffing issues or to facilitate a deep clean if necessary, then it should be closed to all (both pupils and school staff) for the duration of the closure whilst it is cleaned.

*Will every area of the school/nursery need to be cleaned even if it has not been contaminated?*

Droplets of virus or bacteria are not visible and therefore it is important cleaning is increased across those areas of highest risk. A risk assessment should be undertaken by the school, taking into account the individuals or areas affected and the nature of school movement. PHE and Health and Safety teams will be able to provide further advice.

## **6. References**

Further general guidance on health protection in schools and infectious diseases can be found in the following document.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-protection-in-schools-and-other-childcare-facilities>

## Appendix 1 – Hand washing



## Appendix 2 – Template letter for parents

Date

Dear Parent/Guardian

I am writing to let you know that a number of children and staff at school/nursery have experience gastro-enteritis (diarrhoea and vomiting) over the last few days.

Gastroenteritis is a very common condition that causes diarrhoea and vomiting. It's usually caused by a bacterial or viral stomach bug. Gastroenteritis can be unpleasant, but is not usually serious and clears up by itself within a few days. The main symptoms of gastroenteritis are:

- diarrhoea
- feeling sick
- vomiting
- a mild fever

The bugs that cause gastroenteritis can spread very easily from person to person by close contact with someone with gastroenteritis, touching contaminated surfaces or objects, or eating contaminated food. Individuals are most infectious when their symptoms start until 48 hours after all their symptoms have passed.

In line with usual practice the school has contacted Public Health England and Derbyshire County Council Health and Safety team. Parents and carers are advised of the following;

- Please notify the school of the nature of the illness if your child is to be absent from school.
- Children with any of the symptoms above should remain off school for 48 hours after the last symptom. This is essential in order to reduce the spread of the illness to other children within the school.
- Children who become ill during the day should be collected as soon as possible.
- You don't usually need to see your GP if you think your child has gastroenteritis, however if you are concerned about your child or require further information you can visit [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk) or speak to NHS 111 or your GP.

Please be assured of our commitment to the health and well-being of our children and staff at all times. Should you have any concerns or questions, please feel free to telephone the school.....

Yours sincerely

Yours faithfully

Head Teacher/Nursery Manager



