

# GI Infection *In Schools*

HELPFUL HINTS FOR CONTROLLING  
GASTROINTESTINAL (GI) INFECTIONS  
IN YOUR SCHOOL

GASTROINTESTINAL INFECTION (GI INFECTION) IS AN ILLNESS WITH  
DIARRHEA AND/OR VOMITING.

## What is a GI Infection Outbreak?

An outbreak is when more people than normal are ill. You should report it to your local public health unit if you have more than 10% of students home from your school due to diarrhea or vomiting (GI Infection). Public health may also investigate if a few students are ill with a known bacteria. An example would be when two or more children are ill with a disease like Salmonella or E. coli 0157 which are common causes of 'food poisoning.'

GI infections in schools are generally spread from person to person, but sometimes can be spread through water or food. The most common causes of GI infections are viruses. Such infections start with sudden nausea, vomiting and/or diarrhea, and usually last 24 to 48 hours. Sometimes, these viral infections are incorrectly called the 'stomach flu'. They spread easily from person to person as both feces (poo) and vomit (puke) are infectious. Commonly touched items like door handles or bathroom taps can easily become contaminated. With that in mind, it is important to clean and disinfect well in a school during a GI outbreak, using the right type of product that will kill the virus.

*If you have more than 10% of students ill due to GI Infection or think there may be an outbreak of GI Infection in your school, please call your local health unit.*

Please consult with your school nurse if considering sending letters home to parents.



## Who do we call if we suspect an outbreak?

You should call your local public health unit and speak to a public health nurse. You can find a list of local Public Health Units at:

<http://www.interiorhealth.ca/YourHealth/Documents/PublicHealthCentres.pdf>

## What information does public health need?

**You should provide your public health nurse with the following information:**

- The number of children and staff in the school
- The number of children and staff who are ill with vomiting or diarrhea
  - Let the nurse know if illness is mostly in 1 or 2 classrooms/school groups
  - Provide average number of days students are away ill
  - Advise nurse if any students have been hospitalized or have bloody diarrhea
  - You may be asked to update this information DAILY for your local public health nurse
- A list of extracurricular activities, clubs and special events that were held in the 2 weeks prior to the first illnesses
- A list of any food events in the school for the 2 weeks before the first people became ill
- The usual rate of absenteeism for the school

*Public Health may ask for more information if required. This may include a list with:*

- Date the illness started for each ill person
- Date the illness ended for each individual
- The symptoms of each ill person
- Contact information for students or their parents.

At the beginning of the year, remind parents to report if their child is away from school due to GI Infection (diarrhea or vomiting).

# Cleaning and Disinfecting Your School



IT MAY BE NECESSARY TO DO EXTRA CLEANING AND DISINFECTION OF THE SCHOOL AT NIGHT OR OVER A WEEKEND WHEN CHILDREN ARE NOT THERE.

*Staff involved in cleaning should be given the right protective equipment. This may include disposable gloves, a gown/apron and a surgical mask. Eye protection is important if splashes are possible. Staff should be taught how to correctly use the cleaning agents and protective equipment. Wash hands frequently, especially after handling feces (poo), vomit (puke) or contaminated objects. Most disinfectants should only be used in well-ventilated areas. Toys that are put in children's mouths should be rinsed with clean water after they have been disinfected.*

## Use a Two-Step Process:

1. Always clean with detergent and water first to remove organic matter
2. Follow by disinfection. Disinfection is more effective after the area has been properly cleaned with a detergent.

Use a disinfectant that works against norovirus, feline calicivirus or murine norovirus and follow manufacturer's instructions. Examples are

- Sodium hypochlorite (household bleach) solution at 1000-5000ppm
- 0.5% accelerated hydrogen peroxide solution.

## **If a child vomits (pukes) or has an accident involving diarrhea in a common area:**

- Make a fresh disinfectant solution by mixing 100 ml of 5.25% bleach in 1 litre of water, or use a commercial pre-mixed 0.5% accelerated hydrogen peroxide solution.
- Use paper towels to soak up vomit or stool. Put these and any solid bits directly into a plastic garbage bag.
- Clean the soiled area with detergent and hot water.
- Disinfect the area by wiping with the bleach or accelerated hydrogen peroxide solution. Use a fresh paper towel. Follow manufacturer's instructions. If there are no manufacturer's

instructions, allow disinfectant solution to air dry.

- Consider rinsing all surfaces with water after adequate contact time with disinfectant. Chemical irritants can trigger asthma in some people.
- Dispose of all paper towels and gloves into the garbage bag and tie closed.
- Wash hands thoroughly using soap and running water for at least 30 seconds.
- Take garbage bag immediately to the dumpster and **thoroughly** wash hands again.

A bleach solution of 5000 ppm (1 part bleach to 9 parts water) should be used to clean accidents.

If a child vomits or has an accident involving diarrhea in an area where there is food, throw away any food within 2 metres of the soiled area. If you use a mechanical dishwasher, make sure that it is working as intended by the manufacturer. You may need to confirm the correct water temperature and/ or monitor the chemical sanitizer concentrations. If a residential dishwasher is being used, it should meet NSF standard 184 for residential dishwashers.

Contaminated furniture and carpets should first be cleaned with detergent and hot water. They should then be disinfected (with a 1:50 bleach solution or a 0.5% accelerated hydrogen peroxide solution) or steam cleaned. Clean at least 2 metres around the soiled area.

## HAND WASHING: The Best Defense



Hand washing helps prevent the spread of infections. Encourage students to wash hands after using the toilet and before every snack and meal. In the lower grades, staff should supervise the hand washing.

## OTHER HELPFUL INTERVENTIONS

- If a child becomes ill at school, keep them away from other students until they can go home. If possible, have them use a dedicated bathroom. Clean and disinfect the bathroom after use.
- Encourage parents to keep sick children at home.
- Do not allow self-service of shared food, such as snack trays. Have staff distribute food to students.

## DAILY CLEANING

Clean and disinfect commonly touched areas such as door handles, desks, light switches, hand rails and bathrooms at least **DAILY**.

It may be necessary to clean more often.

Use a **1:50 bleach solution** (1000 ppm = 20 ml of 5.25% bleach in 1 litre of water) or a **0.5% accelerated hydrogen peroxide** solution to disinfect after cleaning.