



**FOR RELEASE:** January 24, 2012

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## **GI Illness Increasing in Muskegon County, Norovirus Circulating**

Muskegon, MI – Muskegon County has been experiencing an increase in reports of gastrointestinal (GI) illness, some of which have been confirmed as caused by Norovirus. This increase is part of a recent statewide trend in Norovirus activity. Norovirus infections occur year round but tend to increase in cooler months. Public Health – Muskegon County would like to ensure everyone stays healthy by sharing the following information.

Norovirus typically causes nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and stomach cramping. Symptoms may also include low-grade fever, headache, fatigue and muscle aches. Symptoms may begin 12 to 48 hours after exposure. Symptoms last about 1 to 2 days and, in most cases, ill persons get better on their own. Sometimes people need to see a health care provider mainly due to dehydration, with the very young and elderly at highest risk. Those with severe diarrhea should drink lots of liquids.

Norovirus is very contagious and can be easily spread through food, person-to-person contact, or by contaminated surfaces, especially in group settings. People can reduce their chance of getting infected by frequent hand washing using soap and warm running water for a minimum of 20 seconds (alcohol based hand sanitizers do NOT work against norovirus).

Preventing contamination of food, drinks, and surfaces are critical to prevent the spread of norovirus. Anyone with norovirus must not prepare or serve food for others for 3 days after symptoms have stopped. Spread of norovirus can also be reduced through prompt disinfection of contaminated surfaces with household chlorine bleach-based cleaners and prompt washing of soiled articles of clothing. Since the virus is passed in vomit and stool, children should not go to daycare or school while they have diarrhea or vomiting. Persons who work in nursing homes, take care of patients, or handle food should stay out of work until at least 2 to 3 days after symptoms end.

“People who work at a job preparing food for others need to be especially cautious,” said Ken Kraus, Public Health Director for Muskegon County. “The virus is highly contagious and spreads very easily. Without meaning to, a sick food handler can easily contaminate the food and cause an outbreak.”

Muskegon County restaurants are reminded that if an employee becomes ill with norovirus, they are to be excluded from the establishment and the local health department must be notified for consultation per the 2005 FDA Food Code. Restaurants with concerns are encouraged to call the Food Service Sanitation program at (231) 724-4406. Information about norovirus, including cleaning and disinfection guidance can be found on the public health department’s website at [www.muskegonhealth.net](http://www.muskegonhealth.net).

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### Editorial Notes:

- Norovirus is known incorrectly as the “stomach flu”. Norovirus is NOT related to the flu (influenza), which is a respiratory illness caused by a different virus.
- For information on statewide norovirus activity, please call Angela Minicuci, Public Information Officer, Michigan Department of Community Health, at (517) 241-2112.