

INFLUENZA, STOMACH FLU, AND NOROVIRUS

Influenza

Seasonal influenza, commonly called “the flu,” is caused by influenza viruses, which infect the respiratory tract (i.e., the nose, throat, lungs). Unlike many other viral respiratory infections, such as the common cold, the flu can cause severe illness and life-threatening complications in many people.

Some people, such as those 65 and over, young children, pregnant women, and people with certain health conditions (asthma and other breathing problems, heart disease, weakened immune system, etc.) are at high risk for serious flu complications.

The flu season can begin as early as October and may last through early May. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that everyone be vaccinated on an annual basis.

Licensees also can take everyday precautions to protect clients/residents, staff, and visitors by following these steps:

- educate clients/residents, employees and visitors about the flu, including measures to prevent the spread of the virus and contain the virus;
- encourage or assist clients/residents who are sick with the flu to refrain from close contact with others residents;
- encourage or assist clients/residents in using tissues or covering nose/mouth area if sneezing or coughing. The California Department of Public Health (CDPH) recommends sneezing or coughing into the elbow to also avoid the spread of germs;
- encourage or assist clients/residents with hand-washing – using soap and water. Everyone in the facility, including visitors, should wash their hands often during the day;
- encourage or assist clients/residents to not touch the eyes, nose or mouth areas as germs spread when touching these areas and then touching others;
- encourage staff to maintain clean and disinfected common services and objects that may be contaminated with germs; and
- ask – if a licensee/staff encounters an outbreak of the flu in the facility, contact the local health department for information on outbreak management.

For more information on Influenza, see:

CDPH, “Influenza (Flu)”

[http://www.cdph.ca.gov/HealthInfo/discond/Pages/Influenza\(Flu\).aspx](http://www.cdph.ca.gov/HealthInfo/discond/Pages/Influenza(Flu).aspx)

CDC, “Seasonal Influenza (Flu)”

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu>

CDC, “What You Should Know and Do this Flu Season If You Are 65 Years and Older”

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/disease/65over.htm>

Norovirus

Each year, more than 20 million cases of gastroenteritis or “stomach flu” are caused by noroviruses. Symptoms range from simple nausea to food poisoning, according to the CDC. This virus, which is not related to the flu, is estimated to cause over 70,000 hospitalizations and 800 deaths each year in the U.S.

A good clue to licensees and staff that an outbreak is due to Norovirus is the prevalence of both vomiting and diarrhea with many residents experiencing both symptoms, according to the CDPH. No specific treatment is available. Persons who are severely dehydrated may need fluid and electrolyte therapy.

Noroviruses are spread very easily, especially by sick food handlers and by eating contaminated commercial foods such as leafy vegetables, fruits, and oysters. There is no vaccine for norovirus; however, the following tips can help licensees and staff prevent contracting or transmitting the illness:

- encourage or assist clients/residents to wash hands thoroughly with soap and water;
- encourage employees and visitors to wash hands thoroughly when at the facility;
- wash all fruits and vegetables thoroughly – and cook oysters and other seafood thoroughly as well;
- maintain clean and disinfected common surfaces and objects in the facility; and
- wash laundry thoroughly.

For more information on the flu, see:

CDPH: “Norovirus (Norwalk Virus)”

<http://www.cdph.ca.gov/HealthInfo/discond/Pages/Norovirus.aspx>

CDC: “Norovirus”

<http://www.cdc.gov/norovirus/index.html>

In addition to above recommendations, licensees should practice universal precautions to prevent or respond to occurrences such as the flu, viruses, infections, etc.

California Code of Regulations, Title 22, Division 6, Chapter 8, section 87101 (u)(1), Definitions, provides information on Universal Precautions. *(Note: this information is also contained in the Community Care Facility regulations under definitions).*

(u)(1) "Universal Precautions" means an approach to infection control that treats all human blood and body fluids as if they are infectious. Generally, universal precautions consist of regular hand washing after coming into contact with another person's body fluids (mucous, saliva, urine, etc.) and includes use of gloves when handling blood or body fluids that contain blood. Specifically, universal precautions consist of the following four basic infection control guidelines.

(A) Hand washing - Staff should wash their hands in the following situations, but not limited to these situations:

1. After assisting with incontinent care or wiping a resident's nose.
2. Before preparing or eating food.
3. After using the toilet.
4. Before and after treating or bandaging a cut.
5. After wiping down surfaces, cleaning spills, or any other housekeeping.
6. After being in contact with any body fluids from another person, even if they wore gloves during contact with body fluids.

(B) Gloves

1. Use gloves only one time, for one incident or resident.
 - (i) Air dry the hands or dry the hands on a single-use paper towel prior to putting on a new pair of gloves
 - (ii) Dispose of used gloves immediately after use.
2. Staff should always wear gloves in the following situations, but not limited to these situations:
 - (i) When they come into contact with blood or body fluids.
 - (ii) When they have cuts or scratches on their hands.

- (iv) When administering first aid for a cut, a bleeding wound, or a bloody nose.
- (C) Cleaning with a disinfectant - Staff should clean with a disinfectant:
1. On all surfaces and in the resident's room and on an "as needed" basis on any surface that has come into contact with blood.
 2. Such as basic bleach solution, made fresh daily by mixing 1/4 cup household liquid chlorine bleach in one gallon of tap water, or one tablespoon bleach in one quart of water.
- (D) Proper disposal of infectious materials - Staff should dispose of infectious materials by placing them in a plastic trash bag, tying the bag with a secure tie, and disposing of it out of reach of residents and children.

Other Resource Information on Influenza, Stomach Flu and Norovirus

CDC - Influenza

- "What You Should Know for the 2013-2014 Influenza Season"
<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/season/flu-season-2013-2014.htm>
- "People at High Risk of Developing Flu–Related Complications"
http://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/disease/high_risk.htm