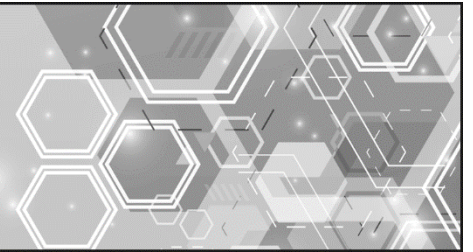




Durham Region Health Department **Facts about...**



Gastrointestinal Illness Outbreaks in Schools

What is gastrointestinal illness (GI)?

GI, commonly called “the stomach flu”, is an infection caused by a variety of viruses that results in vomiting and diarrhea, including norovirus, adenovirus and rotavirus. These viruses are easily spread through contaminated food and water or by touching contaminated surfaces and then touching your mouth and ingesting the virus.

How to stop the spread of a GI Outbreak?

- Educate students and staff on the signs, symptoms and ways to prevent GI
- Encourage staff, students and parents/guardians to report symptoms when absent due to illness
- Communicate with staff, students and parents/guardians about increased illness in the school
- Discourage students and staff from sharing food and drinks
- Notify parents/guardians as soon as their child is ill. The ill child should be isolated from other children and supervised until they are picked up; the child should not be sent home on the bus.
- Once the ill student/staff has left, thoroughly clean and disinfect the areas, including any washrooms they used
- Minimize the use of shared items, and, clean and disinfect between uses
- Practice effective hand hygiene
- Clean and disinfect surfaces effectively

How to practise effective hand hygiene?

- Encourage frequent hand washing by all students and staff
- Hand washing with liquid soap and warm water for at least 15 seconds is the preferred method of hand hygiene in schools, and when hands are visibly soiled. Do not use shared towels to dry hands.
- Provide 70-90% alcohol-based hand sanitizer that is easily accessible
- Hand sanitizer should NOT be used if hands are visibly soiled
- Wash hands AFTER the following: toileting, touching contaminated surfaces, play
- Wash hands BEFORE and AFTER: eating, preparing food, and caring for a sick child

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How to effectively clean and disinfect surfaces?

- Increase the frequency of cleaning and disinfection of common areas and high-touch surfaces such as doorknobs, handrails, washrooms, faucet handles, computer keyboards/mouse, desktops, shared student materials, toys, gym equipment, school buses, etc.
- Immediate cleaning and disinfection are required when surfaces are visibly contaminated by vomit or diarrhea. Refer to poster: [Cleaning a Blood or Body Fluid Spill](#)
- Check the product label for a claim against Norovirus and a DIN (Drug Identification Number), since not all disinfectant wipes are effective against GI illnesses

Additional outbreak measures:

- Postpone special events, performances and celebrations that involve bringing in family members and visitors
- Postpone student field trips and activities including assemblies, overnight trips, crowded indoor venues, visits to settings with vulnerable populations (e.g., long-term care homes, retirement homes/residences)
- Other measures and/or exceptions may be recommended by Durham Region Health Department depending on the situation
- Contact the Durham Region Health Department for outbreak management support as needed

How long should ill students and staff be excluded?

Individuals with diarrhea or vomiting should not return to school until symptom-free for at least 48 hours (i.e., 48hrs after the last episode of vomiting/diarrhea). Seek medical attention if symptoms worsen.

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June 12, 2025

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If you require this information in an accessible format, contact 1-800-841-2729.

