

5. Gastrointestinal Illness

Gastrointestinal Illness	
What they are	An infection caused by a bacteria or virus which irritates the stomach. Sometimes called “stomach flu”, but is not caused by the influenza or “flu” virus. Examples: • E. coli • Norovirus • Salmonella • Shigella • Cholera • C.difficile 
Symptoms	• Stomach cramping • Unexplained vomiting • Diarrhea (2 or more times above baseline) • Fever/chills 
How they spread	• From person to person (e.g. coughs, sneezes, singing, talking) • Drinking/eating contaminated food or drinks • Contact with things with the vomit or stool of a sick person • Swimming or bathing in contaminated water • Infrequent or improper handwashing after using the toilet • Sharing cigarettes, straws, utensils or pipes • Sex activities where your mouth is on someone’s bum or you put your mouth on something that has been in someone’s bum

Learn more about Gastrointestinal Illness:

- Poster on Gastrointestinal illness in poster section of Appendices
- HealthLinkBC: [Gastroenteritis in Adults and Older Children](#)

5.1 How to Prevent Gastrointestinal Illness

Prepare for and prevent Gastrointestinal Illness on site:

- ☐ **Keep a list** of contacts in healthcare and Public Health. Use “Key Health Contacts” template in this handbook.

- ☐ **Follow prevention measures.** Practice and encourage habits that reduce the risk of getting sick:
 - Wash hands with soap and water when:
 - Hands are visibly soiled or after using the bathroom
 - Before eating or preparing food
 - Alcohol-based hand sanitizer can be used in other situations
 - Avoid sharing drinks, food, utensils, cigarettes, and smoking supplies
 - Ensure proper safe handling of food (refer to infographic in handbook)

- ☐ **Keep supplies** like hand soap, alcohol-based hand sanitizer, and masks in easy to access locations.

- ☐ **Follow** your site protocols on routine cleaning and disinfection
 - Have a spill kit ready. Including a higher concentration disinfectant for when blood or body fluids are present (e.g. vomit, diarrhea)

- ☐ **Follow** your site’s sick day policy when staff are experiencing symptoms of illness

- ☐ **Keep guidelines and posters** for Gastrointestinal Illness management available for staff and clients for when Gastrointestinal Illness is detected.

5.2 How to Manage Gastrointestinal Illness

Admission to shelter

Clients should not be denied access to shelters based on illness. The risk of a person with an illness transferring their illness to another client can be reduced with cleaning and distancing measures. In certain instances, Public Health may give a different recommendation, including the following situations:

- A Public Health order during a pandemic
- A case-by-case basis for a person being followed by Public Health who requires specific management

In these instances, there will be other arrangements made for the person who is unwell. However, there is currently no need to deny entry on an individual health basis, unless directed otherwise by your local Public Health office.

What to do when Gastrointestinal Illness is Increasing at your Site:

- ☐ **Identify** client(s) experiencing common symptoms of Gastrointestinal Illness (e.g. stomach cramping, vomiting, diarrhea, fever/chills).
- If 3 or more clients and/or staff are experiencing symptoms within a 4-day period, please call your local Public Health office for guidance on infection control measures.

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- ☐ **Encourage** staff and clients to wash hands frequently
 - Ensure hand sinks have adequate supply of hot and cold water, liquid hand soap, and paper towel

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- ☐ **Separate** clients with illness from clients who are not sick when possible and practical:
 - Have a separate washroom for clients who are ill
 - Let clients who are unwell eat meals at separate times or in a separate room
 - Never have people who are unwell prepare meals or serve food for others
 - Limit client handling of shared food and utensils
 - Avoid sharing drinks, food, utensils, cigarettes, or smoking supplies with people who are unwell

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- ☐ **Wear personal protective equipment (PPE)** if coming into contact with body substances (e.g. gloves and if there is a possibility of splashing, wear a gown and facial protection) and follow additional PPE guidance from your Public Health team.

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- ☐ **Watch** for potential spread among staff and clients.
 - Report additional symptomatic clients and/or staff to Public Health

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- ☐ **Start extra cleaning** and disinfecting protocols by:
 - Prioritize cleaning and disinfecting common areas where people gather and high-touch areas (e.g. common amenity spaces, doorknobs, countertops, bathroom surfaces) a minimum of 3 or more times per day
 - Wash and dry clothing and bedding using high heat settings
 - Utilizing an appropriate disinfectant that can kill norovirus for contaminated surfaces:

Regular cleaning: 1 litre of water (4 cups) per 20 mL (4 teaspoons) bleach

For blood or body substances: 1 litre of water (4 cups) per 125ml (half cup) bleach

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- ☐ **Help get medical care** for people who are sick as needed or requested (e.g. physician connected to shelter, walk-in clinic, emergency room, see: Key Health Contacts)

When to call Public Health for Gastrointestinal Illness

Call your local Public Health office if **3 or more clients and/or staff are experiencing gastrointestinal illness symptoms within a 4-day period**. Be ready to discuss:

- The number of people affected
- The symptoms the people have
- When the symptoms started
- Whether the symptoms are getting better or worse

Your local Public Health office may declare a Gastrointestinal Illness outbreak and advise on next steps. They may advise on:

- Specific cleaning protocols
- How to separate clients who are sick
- How to prevent the spread of illness
- Cancellation of large group activities if necessary.

Your local Public Health office is available to take your calls if you have any questions or concerns.

Please call during daytime hours whenever you have concerns regarding groups of severe or unusual illness or would like help to manage the spread of illness at your site.