



Viral Gastroenteritis Outbreaks in Nursing Homes or Long-Term Care Facilities Guidelines for Environmental Decontamination

Georgia Division of Public Health

Although viruses that cause viral gastroenteritis (stomach flu, viral diarrhea, winter vomiting disease, norovirus, Norwalk-like virus) are primarily spread from person-to-person, fomites can play an important role in sustaining transmission during outbreaks in closed settings. This is because noroviruses have a very low infectious dose and can live on surfaces (including carpet) for several days. Noroviruses are relatively hardy and proper disinfection of potential fomites is an important component of controlling nursing home outbreaks.

Surfaces

All surfaces in the nursing home (floors, tabletops, door knobs, etc...) should be disinfected regularly with a 1000 ppm (0.1%) hypochlorite (bleach) solution (Appendix A). Bathrooms, kitchen areas, and surfaces that are touched frequently (such as doorknobs) should be kept particularly clean. For soft surfaces that may be damaged by hypochlorite, phenols may be used. Non-disposable mop heads should be laundered in hot water after cleaning contaminated areas. Cleaning up vomit and feces can result in infection and special precautions should be followed:

- Wear protective clothing, including disposable gloves and an apron or gown during cleaning. Because virus particles can become airborne during cleaning, it may be beneficial for workers to wear a mask when cleaning areas visibly soiled with vomit or feces.
- Use paper towels to soak up excess liquid then transfer the towels and any solid material to a clinical waste bag.
- Clean the contaminated area with detergent and hot water using a disposable cloth, then disinfect the area with a freshly-made 1000 ppm (0.1%) hypochlorite solution for at least 5 minutes. For heavily contaminated areas, 5000 ppm (0.5%) should be used to disinfect surfaces (Appendix A).
- When finished, place gloves and cleaning cloths into the clinical waste bag, seal it, and place it in the trash.
- Remove protective clothing worn while cleaning and dispose of it in a sealed bag or launder it appropriately.
- Wash hands thoroughly using soap and water and dry them.

Linens and Disposables

- Handle soiled linens and clothing as little as possible to prevent contamination of the air and exposure of persons handling the linen.
- Carefully transport laundry in an enclosed and sanitary manner (e.g., in a plastic bag or other bag appropriate for transporting infected linen).

- Promptly machine wash the laundry with detergent in hot water at the maximum cycle length, and then machine dry it.
- Linens soiled with vomit and/or feces should be washed separately from other linens.
- Promptly throw away soiled diapers or other disposable materials in a separate plastic bag.

Carpet

- Clean contaminated carpet with detergent and hot water, and then disinfect it with an appropriate disinfectant. Alternatively, the carpet may be steam cleaned.
- Wear protective gear (including gloves and apron or gown) while cleaning. Wearing a mask may be beneficial.
- Vacuum cleaning carpets and buffing floors are not recommended during an outbreak. They have the potential to recirculate the virus.

Cleaning up vomit in food preparation areas

- Using the above principles, carefully remove all vomit and clean the area.
- Disinfect the food preparation area with a freshly prepared 1000 ppm (0.1%) hypochlorite solution and for heavily contaminated surfaces, use 5000 ppm (0.5%). For food preparation surfaces, the 5000 ppm (0.5%) solution should be followed by a clear-water rinse. (Appendix A)
- Dispose of any food in the vicinity that may have been contaminated by aerosolized vomitus or feces, or that may have been handled by the infected person. Keep in mind that aerosolized virus particles may travel some distance from where the vomiting occurred.
- Any incident of vomiting in a public area should be reported promptly to the appropriate managers.