

MEDIA RELEASE

2 March 2018

Update: Gastroenteritis outbreak in Nelson

The outbreak of gastroenteritis that is occurring at Nelson Hospital is continuing and the Nelson Marlborough Public Health Service has renewed its advice about how to prevent the spread in the community.

Hospital Operations Manager and Associate Director of Nursing Linda Ryan says that robust infection prevention practice is in place and has been strengthened again since 6pm yesterday with more information provided to staff, patients and visitors about the processes and procedures in place to limit the outbreak.

The current situation in the hospital is:

- 8 patients at Nelson Hospital are currently in isolation with gastroenteritis. Of these 8, 3 were new cases admitted to isolation overnight.

Two of the three are patients who had been exposed to another patient with gastroenteritis, prior to knowledge of the outbreak. The third person was admitted to hospital from the community and who was not showing symptoms at that time. This person quickly became sick with gastroenteritis and was put into isolation. This means that they contracted the illness in the community and not in hospital.

- 4 of the original 6 patients in isolation at 5pm yesterday have been discharged.

Dr Andrew Lindsay, Medical Officer of Health with the Nelson Marlborough Public Health Service reminds people not to visit public places – especially hospitals, schools, early childhood education centres, rest homes and workplaces – if they have had or vomiting that finished less than 48 hours ago.

“Gastroenteritis is highly infectious, very easily spread from person to person and people are contagious for up to 48 hours after symptoms have ceased. So if you’ve been sick it’s important to stay away from public places as much as possible for 48 hours after your symptoms cease. And also to avoid handling food served to other people, as much as possible,” Dr Lindsay says.

“Regular and thorough hand washing, with lots of soap of hot water, is very important, especially if you can’t avoid handling food for other people.”

Rest homes and ECEs in the Nelson and Tasman region have been advised by the Nelson Marlborough Public Health Service to be alert to symptoms and how to help prevent outbreaks.

Know the symptoms

The symptoms of gastroenteritis are:

- nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea
- stomach cramps, headache and low-grade fever
- chills and muscle aches

Looking after yourself, and others, at home

Most people with gastroenteritis can treat themselves at home, and help prevent other family members catching it by following good hygiene. Staying at home also helps prevent the spread in the community.

There is no specific treatment for gastroenteritis. Dehydration is the main cause of illness; to prevent this:

- drink plenty of plain water and oral rehydration drinks that can be bought from pharmacies and some supermarkets
- don't take medicines to stop vomiting or diarrhoea (unless prescribed by a doctor) as these will stop your body from getting rid of the gastroenteritis virus

To prevent spreading gastroenteritis to other people:

- isolate yourself or the sick person you are looking after; put them in their own room and prevent others from entering unless necessary
- if you are at a campsite or other public place, consider going home to recover. You can be infectious for up to 48 hours after symptoms cease.
- stay away from other people until well and for 48 hours after the last episode of vomiting or diarrhoea
- avoid preparing food for others if possible
- cook all food thoroughly
- wash hands thoroughly after using the toilet, before preparing food and before eating
- wash and dry your hands well using soap and water and, ideally, follow this with hand sanitiser
- avoid vomiting in sinks or shared basins/surfaces. The toilet is the best place.
- clean up vomit or excretia using gloves (if available), detergent and hot water followed by bleach (household bleach diluted 1part bleach to 10 parts water), or a bleach-based disinfectant
- immediately remove and wash any contaminated clothes and bedding using detergent and hot water
- prepare for gastroenteritis when you pack for a holiday or travel: paper towels, soap and hand sanitiser. Consider packing a small bottle of bleach
- report the illness to campground or DOC staff if relevant

When to see a doctor

People are advised to see a doctor if they, or a family member:

- has blood in their vomit
- gets any new or worse symptoms
- has vomiting or diarrhoea for longer than three days
- becomes badly dehydrated. Signs of dehydration include:
 - little or no urine passed in the last 8 hours and the urine is dark and smelly
 - reduced saliva in their mouth, no tears, sunken eyes, sunken fontanelle in infants
 - dizziness, lethargy (no energy), floppiness, a rapid heart rate and breathing, cool hands and feet or grey cold skin
 - their skin doesn't relax after being pinched.

Call Healthline 0800 611 116 if you are unsure what you should do

ENDS

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