



DEPARTMENT OF  
**HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES**

Promoting and protecting health, well-being, self-sufficiency, and safety of all in Marin County.



## **PUBLIC HEALTH ADVISORY**

January 8, 2013

Larry Meredith, Ph.D.  
DIRECTOR

Matthew Willis, M.D., MPH  
PUBLIC HEALTH OFFICER

899 Northgate Drive  
Suite 104  
San Rafael, CA 94903  
415 473 4163 T  
415 473 2326 F  
415 473 3232 TTY  
[www.marincounty.org/hhs](http://www.marincounty.org/hhs)

### **Outbreaks of Seasonal Gastroenteritis**

The number of reported outbreaks of self-limited acute gastroenteritis in Marin County has increased significantly since December 25, 2012. Affected facilities include a variety of adult congregate living facilities and skilled nursing facilities. The outbreaks are being closely monitored by our Public Health Communicable Disease Prevention and Control Team. The duration of most of the outbreaks is a few days to two weeks which reflects both the natural history of the illness and the control measures taken by the facilities.

The spread, symptoms and resolution of all the reported outbreaks are consistent with Norovirus, and in several cases where testing has occurred Norovirus has been confirmed. These reports suggest more generalized ongoing transmission of seasonal gastroenteritis within our community, likely due to Norovirus. The community will be kept informed if there is a sudden increase or decline in the number of reported acute gastroenteritis outbreaks.

In one facility there were two deaths in the setting of a Norovirus outbreak in the last week of December 2012, which may generate questions for providers from their patients. As noted by local media, both patients were frail elders with serious underlying chronic diseases who had elected to limit any care measures in the event of acute illness. This incident serves as a reminder of the vulnerability of certain at-risk populations to any illness, including vaccine-preventable diseases like influenza, and may prompt providers to verify vaccination status for their patients.

As you know, Norovirus gastroenteritis is abrupt in onset with symptoms of vomiting, cramps and diarrhea being the most common. Dehydration is the most serious clinical concern. Most symptoms resolve within 48-72 hours while viral shedding in stool may continue for 1-2 weeks. The key elements of prevention and control of Norovirus outbreaks are meticulous attention to hand hygiene, isolation of symptomatic patients or staff and decontamination of objects that have been exposed to fecal matter or vomitus. More information can be found at <http://www.cdph.ca.gov/HealthInfo/discond/Pages/Norovirus.aspx>

The Marin County Public Health staff are available and prepared to assist in evaluating or responding to outbreaks in our community. Please feel free to contact them by calling 415-473-4163.

I will send additional information to you as warranted by our local surveillance data.

Sincerely,

Matt Willis, MD MPH  
Public Health Officer

Linda Ferguson, RN, BSN, PHN  
Communicable Disease Controller