



## *HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES DEPARTMENT*

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### **PUBLIC HEALTH –ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH**

412 NE FORD – McMinnville, OR 97128 – (503) 434-7525 - Fax (503) 472-9731

Dec. 19, 2003

Administrator  
address

Dear Administrator;

Yamhill County Public Health would like to bring your attention to an emerging public health issue facing nursing homes, extended care facilities, and retirement homes. You may have heard of norovirus, a highly contagious virus that has been identified as the cause of at least 47 outbreaks in Oregon so far this year.

The purpose of this letter is to let you know how Yamhill County Public Health can help you keep norovirus out of your facility, and how we can assist when you suspect an outbreak may be starting. Our Registered Nurses and Environmental Health Specialists are trained to respond to outbreaks and institute measures to decrease the threat to human health. We will work as a team to collect data and coordinate specimen testing in order to identify disease agents and recommend control measures. Prompt collaboration can help spare your residents and staff the consequences of a major disease outbreak.

Norovirus causes a gastrointestinal illness that is characterized by sudden onset of nausea, vomiting, and/or watery diarrhea. The virus quickly spreads because it is highly infectious, and very persistent in the environment. Elderly patients and those with existing medical conditions are at increased risk for complications because of volume depletion and electrolyte disturbances.

Perhaps the most troubling aspect of norovirus is the fact that people who have been ill remain contagious for up to a week after their symptoms subside. This means that you need to take extra precautions with both employees and residents after they have recovered from their illness. An important point to remember is that norovirus victims cannot get reinfected during the outbreak, so the best people to work with ill residents are staff who have recently recovered from a norovirus infection.

Norovirus outbreaks take two main forms, so you need to be on the lookout for both types. When a food service worker or server is contagious, you would probably see

many people becoming ill at once. When a resident or care employee is contagious the outbreak can build slowly over a week or two and may not be immediately obvious. Either type of outbreak can eventually impact a majority of staff and residents if not addressed promptly.

As a service to your facility, we have compiled information that will help you protect your residents and respond appropriately if norovirus does appear.

Enclosed you will find the following:

- Contact information for Yamhill County Public Health
- A norovirus outbreak poster for your staff
- The CDC's norovirus Q & A sheet
- Cleanup guidelines
- Sample gastroenteritis case report
- Sample visitor poster

If you have any additional questions about norovirus or about communicable disease reporting, please feel free to contact Matt Jaqua, REHS at (503) 434-7423, or Jenny Beecroft, RN (503) 434-7543.

Additional details on norovirus and outbreak control can be found at this Centers for Disease Control (CDC) website.

[www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/revb/gastro/norovirus.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/revb/gastro/norovirus.htm)

Sincerely;

Nancy Nunley, RN, BSN  
Public Health Manager