

Norovirus Break Out

Contributed by Sam Smith
Friday, 21 November 2008

On November 7th, 2008 Hope College in Holland, Michigan was closed due to 120 cases reported of intense flu-like symptoms that after investigation turned out to be the Norovirus. The Ottawa County Health Department closed down the campus and has begun conducting quarantine and clean up of the college's campus. Students were reported to stay home or in their dorms, especially if infected. All activities on and around campus have been canceled or suspended. Hope College wasn't the only campus to close down due to the Norovirus outbreak. Blair Elementary School in Traverse City also closed its campus after around a couple dozen students reported being sick.

So what is the Norovirus and how do you know when you have it? The Norovirus is an RNA virus of the Caliciviridae taxonomic family. It is widely known as causing 90% of all epidemic non-bacterial outbreaks of gastroenteritis around the world. According to Florida Maritime Accident Lawyer, on November 1968 in Norwalk, Ohio; an outbreak of the norovirus was recorded at an elementary school and stool samples were put into storage. By 1972, immune electron microscopy identified the virus and it was named after the city it was found in.

Symptoms and warning signs of the possibility of being infected with the Norovirus are as follows: Nausea, Abdominal Pain, Abdominal Cramps, Watery or Loose Diarrhea, Weight Loss, Malaise, and Low-Grade Fever. Some people don't have symptoms but could infect people with the virus anyway. Unfortunately there are no known effective treatments for curing the Norovirus but if one is infected, they are urged to rest plenty, drink plenty of fluids, and stay secluded from the non-infected. The Norovirus is typically not deadly and will pass through the infected person within a week or two. Those with impaired immune symptoms, the young, and the elderly are at risk for more deadly implications, usually due to de-hydration.

The Norovirus is spread by feces and the contact with feces. Most people get the Norovirus when their food supply is contaminated by feces with the virus and also when the environment is low on hygiene quality. The best way to contain the virus is by washing hands and body regularly, washing produce, disinfecting your living environment, and not sharing personal items.

As the number of infected have risen to around 400, some people are keeping light of the situation. Katie Opatik-Duff, a freshman at Hope College, has created a Facebook page affectionately named "Hope College: The Great Plague of 2008". The page urges students of the college to join and report whether they have been infected or not. The page also offers T-shirts for sale that say "Norovirus 08" on the front and "Victim -- The college is not being quarantined ... students are encouraged to remain calm" on the back.