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www.health.ri.gov

Memo

To: Parents and Guardians
From: Rhode Island Department of Health
Date: January 22, 2018
Subject: Flu and norovirus prevention

The Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH) is urging everyone to practice good health habits to prevent the spread of norovirus, flu, and other respiratory illnesses circulating throughout the state.

[The flu](#) circulates in Rhode Island most years through the end of the spring. It's not too late to get vaccinated. Flu shots are available in pharmacies (for adults) and doctors' offices. If you or your child do catch the flu, prescribed antiviral drugs (not antibiotics) may reduce some of the symptoms.

Ways to Prevent Catching and Spreading the Flu:

- x Get a flu shot.
- x Stay home if you are sick and keep children home from school if they are sick.
- x Cough or sneeze into your elbow.
- x Wash your hands often throughout the day. Use warm water and soap. If soap and water are not available, use alcohol-based hand gel.
- x Stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone.

[Norovirus](#) is a highly contagious stomach illness that can cause people to have extreme vomiting and/or diarrhea for 24-48 hours. (It is often called by other names, such as stomach flu or food poisoning.) Norovirus is found in the stool and vomit of an infected person. People can become infected by eating food or drinking liquids that are contaminated with norovirus; touching surfaces or objects that are contaminated with norovirus, and then placing their hand in their mouth; eating food that is prepared by an infected person; or being in the same room when an infected person vomits.

Ways to Prevent Catching and Spreading Norovirus:

- x Wash your hands carefully with soap and water, especially after using the toilet and changing diapers and always before eating or preparing food.
- x Stay home if you are sick and keep children home from school if they are sick.
- x After an episode of vomiting or diarrhea, immediately clean and disinfect contaminated surfaces by using a bleach-based household cleaner as directed on the product label or a solution made by adding 5 tablespoons of household bleach to 1 gallon of water.
- x Do not prepare food while sick. People who are infected with norovirus should not prepare food for others while they have symptoms and for 3 days after they recover from their illness.

With hospital emergency departments throughout the state seeing high volumes of patients, RIDOH reminds everyone that going to an emergency department for most cases of norovirus and less severe cases of flu, will likely result in long waits because emergency department staff prioritize more serious injuries and illnesses. If you are not sure if you or your child need to go to the emergency department, contact your primary care provider. A primary care provider will be able to give you guidance about the next best step for you or your child. (Most offices have physicians on call after hours.)