



California  
Department of  
Health Services

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Director

State of California—Health and Human Services Agency  
**Department of Health Services**



**ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGER**  
Governor

October 31, 2006

AFL 06-32

TO: SKILLED NURSING FACILITIES (SNF)  
INTERMEDIATE CARE FACILITIES (ICF)  
GENERAL ACUTE CARE HOSPITALS (GACH)  
ACUTE PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITALS (APH)  
INTERMEDIATE CARE FACILITIES-DEVELOPMENTAL DISABLED  
(ICF/DD)  
INTERMEDIATE CARE FACILITIES-DEVELOPMENTAL DISABLED-  
NURSING (ICF/DD-N)  
INTERMEDIATE CARE FACILITIES-DEVELOPMENTAL DISABLED-  
HABILITATIVE (ICF/DD-H)  
CORRECTIONAL TREATMENT CENTERS (CTC)  
CONGREGATE LIVING HEALTH FACILITIES (CLHF)  
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

SUBJECT: **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE PREVENTION AND CONTROL OF  
VIRAL GASTROENTERITIS OUTBREAKS IN CALIFORNIA LONG-  
TERM CARE FACILITIES 2006**

Enclosed are the *Recommendations of the Prevention and Control of Viral Gastroenteritis Outbreaks in California Long-term Care Facilities 2006* which has been updated and revised since last distributed in 2003. **Although the publication is intended for long-term care facilities, its guidelines may be used by all health facility types.** This publication is intended to assist facility infection control committees in the development of a rational approach to the control of viral gastroenteritis outbreaks.

Outbreaks of gastroenteritis in long-term care facilities (LTCFs) are not uncommon, and can become epidemic during the winter and early spring. Viruses (norovirus specifically) cause most of these outbreaks, and they are almost always transmitted from **person-to-person** (including residents, staff, visitors and volunteers). Norovirus can persist in the environment and is resistant to most disinfectants, and as a result **contamination of the environment** plays a key role in transmission. While norovirus infection is usually mild in otherwise healthy adults, illness can be severe in the elderly, particularly in those with underlying medical problems. In one recent 2-year period (July 2002 - June 2004), California had 480 reported outbreaks of viral gastroenteritis. Over

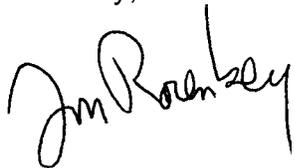
half the outbreaks occurred in LTCFs, and 80% of these were in skilled nursing facilities (nursing homes). In these nursing homes over 6500 persons became ill, 120 residents were hospitalized, and 29 died. In some instances as many as 80% of residents and 40% of staff became ill. The longest outbreak lasted 37 days.

A norovirus outbreak that begins with a single illness can rapidly spread and within a few days involve many residents and staff. At this point it can become increasingly difficult to control. Norovirus has an incubation period of 24-48 hours; therefore, on any given day, those who have been exposed and infected will not show evidence of illness until the following 1-2 days. If control measures are not in place, those who then become ill may expose many others. The key to controlling outbreaks is early recognition when only a few cases have occurred and prompt institution of control measures, preferably before you are even sure if an outbreak is underway.

**An outbreak of viral gastroenteritis should be suspected when two or more residents and/or staff develop a new onset of vomiting and diarrhea within one to two days.** As soon as an outbreak is suspected it should be reported to both local health departments and to Licensing and Certification (L&C) Program district office (<http://www.dhs.ca.gov/lnc/org/default.htm>), as required by Title 22 regulations.

The Department of Health Services encourages facility staff to review these advisory recommendations. Questions regarding outbreak control should be referred to your local health department. Questions or comments regarding these recommendations should be directed to Jon Rosenberg M.D. or Sue Chen, Division of Communicable Disease Control at (510) 620-3434. Written comments about the information contained in these recommendations should be addressed to Dr. Rosenberg, California Department of Health Services, Division of Communicable Disease Control, 850 Marina Bay Parkway, Richmond, CA 94804.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jon Rosenberg". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jon Rosenberg, M.D.  
Division of Communicable Disease Control

Enclosure