



# Microbe Monthly

Communicable Disease (CD) Report

November 2010

El Paso County Department of Health and Environment

Communicable Disease/TB Program

[www.elpasocountyhealth.org](http://www.elpasocountyhealth.org)

## Norovirus, Unwelcome Winter Guest

With attention focused on the arrival of seasonal influenza, **norovirus** activity is sometimes less noticed. Epidemic norovirus-associated gastroenteritis (sometimes referred to by patients as the "stomach flu," which often causes the illness to be confused with influenza) has arrived in El Paso County. The CDC estimates more than 21 million cases of acute gastroenteritis in the U.S. each year are due to norovirus infection, and more than 50% of all foodborne disease outbreaks can be attributed to noroviruses.

Outbreaks of norovirus in long-term care facilities often serve as sentinel events indicating that norovirus is circulating more widely in the community. While individual cases of norovirus are not reportable in Colorado, group or facility outbreaks must be reported within 24 hours. During October the Health Department investigated four confirmed or probable norovirus outbreaks at institutionalized healthcare settings, which affected frail patient populations. Contaminated food from infected food handlers or healthcare workers may have contributed to the spread of disease with some of these outbreaks. Strict adherence to handwashing, environmental cleaning and exclusion or isolation of ill persons is extremely important to reduce spread of disease.

Currently, state public health laboratories and several commercial reference laboratories have the capability to test both stool and emesis samples for norovirus using reverse transcriptase polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR). Identification of the virus is most successful from specimens taken within 48 to 72 hours after onset of symptoms, although virus can sometimes be found in stool samples taken as late as two weeks after recovery. Healthcare providers are encouraged to contact the Health Department if they suspect a cluster of gastrointestinal illness in settings such as nursing homes, assisted living centers, camps, schools or other settings where people have prolonged close physical contact.

Information is also available at the CDC's website: [www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/submenu/sub\\_norwalk.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/submenu/sub_norwalk.htm)

Norovirus Quick Facts	
Infectious Agent	Single-stranded RNA, non-enveloped viruses of the <i>Caliciviridae</i> family – 5 genogroups known to affect humans
Incubation Period	24-48 hours (range 10-50 hours)
Duration of Illness	Usually 24-72 hours
Symptoms	Acute-onset nausea and vomiting Watery, non-bloody diarrhea Abdominal cramps Occasional low-grade fever
Modes of Transmission	Person-to-person (fecal oral) Fecally contaminated food or water Environmental/fomite contamination Aerosolization of vomitus
Infective Dose	As few as 10 viral particles

## El Paso County Disease Trends

In September and October 2010, 100 communicable disease cases were reported and investigated: campylobacter (11), Giardia (13), Haemophilus influenzae (2), acute hepatitis B (1), chronic hepatitis B (8), invasive pneumococcal disease (9), malaria (1), pertussis (6), Salmonella (9), STEC – shiga-toxin producing E. coli (1), Varicella (13), viral meningitis (25) and West Nile Virus (1).

In September and October the CD Program also received 19 possible foodborne illness complaints and investigated 6 outbreaks (1 pertussis and 5 gastrointestinal illness in long-term care facilities).

## Hot Topics—State and National

### • Influenza surveillance

**Colorado:** For the week ending October 30, there was low levels of influenza activity. Only one influenza-associated hospitalization was reported. **National:** For the week ending October 23, influenza activity was low in the U.S. Influenza A (H3N2 more than 2009 H1N1) and influenza B viruses were identified in small numbers. All 50 states experienced minimal ILI activity.

### • Skunk Rabies Surveillance Update

The most recent case of skunk rabies has been confirmed from Larimer County. The skunk was collected from just south of the Wyoming border. Since January 1, 2010, a total of 61 skunks have been laboratory confirmed with rabies in Colorado.

## Contact Information

### CD/TB Program

Weekday Hours (M-Th)\* 719-578-3220  
After-Hours Emergency 719-**235-2278** ← **NEW # !**

### Main Health Department number

719-578-3199 (follow message prompts)

**\*Note: Health Department regular hours are Monday—Thursday, 7 a.m. to 6 p.m.**

### Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment

Weekday Hours (M-F) 303-692-2700  
After-Hours 303-370-9395