CABINET FOR HEALTH AND FAMILY SERVICES
DEPARTMENT FOR PUBLIC HEALTH

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Vickie Yates Brown Glisson
Secretary

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Dear Health Care Facility Operator or Long Term Care Administrator:

Infectious gastroenteritis is not uncommon in healthcare facilities in Kentucky. In fact, there has been increased awareness of gastrointestinal illnesses in congregate living settings nationwide. These illnesses can cause nausea, diarrhea, vomiting, and stomach cramps, in addition to headache, low-grade fever, muscle aches, and fatigue. A common cause of gastrointestinal outbreaks in institutional environments is a virus called norovirus. This virus is very contagious and can easily spread from person to person through contaminated hands, surfaces, or food, particularly in congregate living situations.

We understand that when residents become ill, it can place a higher demand on staff time, cause stress for staff and residents, and potentially impact the financial viability of your business. In order to assist you in protecting the health of your staff and clients, the Kentucky Department for Public Health and the Office of Inspector General in the Cabinet for Health and Family Services have developed guidelines designed to reduce the number of gastrointestinal outbreaks, prevent spread of illness and assist in quicker recovery. Although targeted toward norovirus, this guidance includes appropriate precautions designed to prevent the spread of contagious diseases that are transmitted through the fecal-oral route. While the guidance is not written into state nursing facility licensure and federal certification laws, the Office of Inspector General encourages adherence to these standards as part of each facility's infection control program, under 42 C.F.R. 483.65, and promotion of a sanitary environment, under 42 C.F.R. 483.15(h) and 483.70.

The document updates and replaces earlier guidance issued to long-term care facilities and nursing homes in 2014. For ease of use, it is purposely divided into sections that address various roles within the facility. Our agencies encourage you to discuss the recommendations contained in this document with supervisors and staff who work in each of the areas outlined. A multidisciplinary, team approach to infection and outbreak control is likely to prove the most successful.

One of the first steps in controlling an outbreak of any communicable disease is early recognition. The Department for Public Health urges your health care facility to report illnesses involving two or more residents with like symptoms or two or more staff with like symptoms to your local health department. The reporting of communicable disease outbreaks is required by law in Kentucky, but it will also help health departments to better assist your facility and minimize the number of affected individuals.

Your local health department, the Department for Public Health and the Office of Inspector General will continue to respond to and offer assistance in case of an infectious disease outbreak in an institutional setting. An infection control program that assures a sanitary environment and prevents the development and transmission of disease and infection protects the health and safety of your residents, staff, and visitors. A copy of this guidance is being circulated to every licensed long term care facility in the Commonwealth of Kentucky.

The Department for Public Health and the Office of Inspector General hope that the tools provided with this letter will prevent or reduce the occurrence of gastrointestinal illnesses in your facility.

Kraig E. Humbaugh, M.D., MPH
Senior Deputy Commissioner
State Epidemiologist
Department for Public Health

Stephanie Hold
Acting Inspector General
Office of Inspector General
Cabinet for Health and Family Services

Attachments:

- Norovirus Factsheet
- DPH Norovirus Response Guide
- Initial GI Outbreak Reporting form
- Final GI Outbreak Reporting form
- Epi-curve Jan 2014-Mar.17,2016