



**CABINET FOR HEALTH AND FAMILY SERVICES
DEPARTMENT FOR PUBLIC HEALTH**

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Audrey Tayse Haynes
Secretary

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Dear Health Care Facility Operator or Long Term Care Administrator:

Over the past several years Kentucky has experienced an increase in the reported number of gastrointestinal illnesses in health care facilities. We are not unique; there has been increased awareness of these kinds of 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 oral-fecal 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 to promote 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 2013. 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 the 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 to your local health department. The reporting of communicable disease outbreaks is required by law, but it will also help health departments to better assist your facility and minimize the number of affected individuals.

Your local health department, 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. Failure to establish and maintain an infection control program that assures a sanitary environment and prevents the development and transmission of disease and infection may jeopardize the health and safety of residents. A copy of this guidance is being circulated to every licensed long term care facility in the Commonwealth of Kentucky.

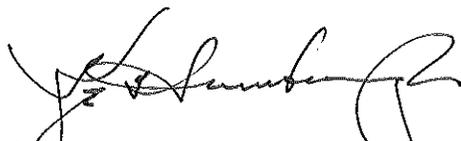
The Department for Public Health and the Office of Inspector General hope that the tools provided with this letter will prevent or reduce the occurrence of gastrointestinal illnesses in your facility.



Stephanie Mayfield Gibson, MD, FCAP
Commissioner
Department for Public Health



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