



Health Protection Agency

**South East London
Health Protection Unit**

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Dear Head Teacher

Over the last few weeks, there have been a number of children at school and nurseries in London unwell with symptoms of a viral illness. The symptoms the children have are consistent with viral gastroenteritis. Although not always confirmed, this is usually caused by Norovirus, a frequent cause of vomiting and diarrhoea in the community during the winter.

The most common symptom is vomiting. Diarrhoea tends to be short-lived and less severe than with other causes of gastroenteritis. Other symptoms include nausea, abdominal cramps, headache, muscle aches, chills and fever. The illness is usually mild in nature and gets better without antibiotics, which are not appropriate for viral illnesses. Symptoms usually last between one and three days.

Norovirus is infectious and is easily spread from person to person by the faecal-oral route and by vomiting, environmental contamination and subsequent indirect person to person spread. Consequently, there are several important preventative steps for schools to take:

- Exclusion: an affected child or member of staff is advised to stay away from school until 72 hours after the vomiting and/or diarrhoea have stopped. This is an important measure that we have asked the school/nursery to adopt in order to limit the spread of this infection to others.
- Good hand hygiene and the supervision of this in younger children.
- Appropriate cleaning of the environment following local infection control guidelines

If you have any further queries please contact the South East London Health Protection Unit on 020 3049 4338.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Rachel Heathcock
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South East London Health Protection Unit