

香港特別行政區政府
衛生署
港口衛生處
皇后大道東二一三號
胡忠大廈十八樓



THE GOVERNMENT OF THE HONG KONG
SPECIAL ADMINISTRATIVE REGION

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
PORT HEALTH OFFICE
18TH FLOOR, WU CHUNG HOUSE
213 QUEEN'S ROAD EAST
WAN CHAI
HONG KONG

27 December 2006

Mr Joseph Tung, JP
Executive Director
Travel Industry Council of Hong Kong

Dear Mr Tung,

Norovirus gastroenteritis outbreak in Japan

Japan is now experiencing infectious gastroenteritis outbreak. Most cases are caused by norovirus infection. Viral gastroenteritis caused by norovirus is usually self-limiting with symptoms of nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, abdominal pain and low-grade fever. The symptoms usually last for 12 to 60 hours.

Travellers going to Japan are advised to take precautions to minimise the risk of infection. They should wash hands thoroughly before eating and after going to toilets and handling vomitus or faecal matter. Food, particularly seafood and shellfish, should be thoroughly cooked before eating. If returned travellers have symptoms of gastroenteritis infection, they should see the doctor immediately, and tell the doctor the recent travel history.

I attach an information sheet on norovirus infection for your reference. Please pass the above information to travel agencies and advise the travellers going to Japan to be vigilant, and observe good personal and environmental hygiene. If travel agents need more information, they may visit our Travel Health Service Website: www.travelhealth.gov.hk or the website of the Centre for Health Protection www.chp.gov.hk for more information.

(Dr. Tina CHAN)
for Chief Port Health Officer
Department of Health

Information Sheet on Norovirus Infection

What is Norovirus infection?

The infection is caused by a group of viruses known as noroviruses. These viruses are a common cause of outbreaks of acute gastroenteritis and food poisoning, especially in elderly homes and schools. The disease affects people of all age groups and tends to be more common during winter. People infected with the disease may have symptoms of nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, abdominal pain and low-grade fever. The symptoms usually last for 12 to 60 hours.

How does it spread?

The infection can be transmitted via the following ways:

- by food or water contaminated with the virus;
- by contact with vomitus or faeces from infected persons;
- by contact with contaminated objects; or
- by aerosol spread with contaminated droplets of splashed vomitus.

The incubation period is usually 24 to 48 hours.

How is it treated?

Given adequate fluids to prevent dehydration and supportive treatment, the disease is usually self-limiting, lasting one to three days. Antibiotics are of no value in treatment.

How can it be prevented?

- Maintain high standards of personal, food and environmental hygiene.
- Wash hands before handling food and eating, and after going to toilet.
- All food, particularly shellfish, should be cooked thoroughly before consumption.
- Food handlers and caretakers developing vomiting or diarrhoea should refrain from work and seek medical advice.
- Wear gloves and a mask while disposing of or handling vomitus and faeces, and wash hands thoroughly afterwards.
- Clean and disinfect soiled linens, clothes and surfaces promptly and thoroughly with household bleach (5.25%) diluted in a ratio of 1 part of bleach in 49 parts of water. Wash hands thoroughly afterwards.
- No vaccine is available for norovirus infection.

For more information on norovirus infection and updated information on the outbreak, please visit:

Centre for Health Protection Website www.chp.gov.hk

Department of Health Travel Health Service Website www.travelhealth.gov.hk

or telephone the 24-Hour Health Education Hotline of the Department of Health 2833 0111