



VIRAL GASTROENTERITIS / NOROVIRUS

There has been recent concern at Rossall School in view of the recent outbreak of viral gastroenteritis in the area.

“Norovirus”, also known as Norwalk virus) is the commonest cause of infectious gastroenteritis in England and Wales. It is sometimes referred to as “Winter Vomiting Disease” as this is typically when symptoms occur, though not invariably. Outbreaks of Novovirus are common in restricted environments, such as hospitals, schools, cruise ships and residential homes, but also occur in the general community.

Symptoms

Norovirus, and other viral types of gastroenteritis are usually mild conditions and are self-limiting. Characteristic features are of nausea, vomiting – sometimes projectile - , watery diarrhea and abdominal cramps. There may be an associated fever. Symptoms generally last between 12 and 60 hours, but most people make a full recovery in 1 – 2 days., though diarrhea may persist a little longer.

The incubation period is generally 24 – 48 hours, though it can be as little as 12 hours.

Management

90% of cases are spread from person to person – this is usually as a result of infection from aerosols of projectile vomit.

Isolation of affected patients is therefore of paramount importance. Boarders should be placed in isolation, and Day Pupils should be sent home.

General hygiene, and handwashing is essential.

Anyone who is affected should not prepare food for others until at least 3 days after symptoms have resolved.

Infectivity generally lasts for 48 hours after resolution of symptoms.

Treatment

The main aim of treatment is to ensure satisfactory fluid replacement, with plenty of clear fluids. This may be supplemented with electrolyte replacement – e.g. diralyte or Rehidrat sachets – available from the Medical Centre.

The illness may be unpleasant, but symptoms usually resolve without any specific medical treatment.

If there are any concerns about an affected individual, then further advice should be sought from the School Medical Centre.

Dr P G Carpenter
School Medical Officer