

DIARRHEA FACT SHEET

What is diarrhea?

- Diarrhea is when a person has more bowel movements than usual, and the bowel movements are less formed and more watery than usual.
- Diarrhea can be the result of food poisoning, infection (Norwalk, Rotavirus), parasites, or other gastric intestinal illnesses.
- Infections that cause diarrhea are highly contagious.
- Diarrhea can be dangerous, if not treated properly, because it drains fluids and salts from the body that can lead to dehydration.

How does it spread?

- Through direct contact with a person who is infected.
- Touching surfaces, like doorknobs that are contaminated and then touching the eyes or mouth.
- Contaminated food or water.
- Some pets.

What are the symptoms?

- Frequent loose and watery bowel movements.
- Fever, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, stomach pains, cramps, and blood and/or mucus in the bowel movements.

When should the camper/staff see a doctor?

- Black or bloody bowel movements.
- Vomiting for more than 4 – 6 hours.
- Fever greater than 38.5C (101.5F) and diarrhea.
- Signs of dehydration: dry mouth or skin, little or no urination, dark urine, weakness, light headedness or dizziness.
- Stomach pains are getting worse.



How can diarrhea be treated?

- Drink lots of fluids to avoid dehydration. Eat a light diet such as the **BRAT** diet (bananas, rice, apple sauce and toast).
- While sports drinks are fine for maintaining hydration in well persons, they are inappropriate for treatment of persons with diarrhea. There are commercial oral rehydration solutions available such as Pedialyte® at your local pharmacy.
- Anti diarrhea medications should be considered only for adults who do not have a fever or bloody/mucus diarrhea.
- The camper/staff with diarrhea should wash their hands thoroughly each time they use the toilet.

How to prevent diarrhea?

- Wash hands thoroughly for at least 30 seconds.
- Use hand sanitizers, with at least 60% alcohol, when access to soap & water is not available.
- Frequently clean high traffic areas (taps, bathrooms, doorknobs, etc) with an appropriate cleaning solution or 1:9 bleach and water solution.
- Do not drink from lakes, streams or springs unless the water is properly treated.
- Exclude campers/staff who are ill from any activities that require direct contact with others.
- Wash all soiled linens in hot water and detergent.
- Abide by proper food handling, storage and cleanliness guidelines. (*Health Protection and Promotion Act RRO 1990, Reg. 568*)
- Food handlers should not work if they have any diarrhea symptoms and not return to work for 48 hours after their symptoms have disappeared.

How can camps reduce the risk of spreading infection from cleaning up vomit or diarrhea?

- Staff must wear disposable gloves. Reusable rubber gloves may be used, but they should be washed after each use with a bleach product.
- Use paper towels to soak up excess liquid and put the paper towels and any solid matter directly into a plastic garbage bag.
- Clean the soiled area with soap and hot water. The same cleaning cloth or sponge should not be used to clean other areas of the camp as this may spread the virus.
- Disinfect the area that has been washed with a freshly made bleach solution (shelf life 8 hours). Make a solution of bleach by mixing 1 part of bleach to 9 parts of water. Household cleaners other than bleach do not work for most of the viruses that cause vomiting and diarrhea. Let air dry for at least 10 minutes.
- Put all cleaning cloths and disposable gloves into a plastic garbage bag.
- Wash your hands well using soap and warm water for at least 30 seconds.

What is an outbreak?

- An enteric (diarrhea) outbreak is defined as the occurrence of two or more cases of enteric illness (diarrhea, nausea, vomiting) linked in terms of time (24 – 48 hours), exposure to source, and most often location.

What should the Camp Director do?

- It is the responsibility of the camp to notify the local public health department immediately of a suspected outbreak (enteric diarrhea & vomiting or respiratory) at camp.
- Isolate the ill camper or staff immediately.
- If an outbreak is declared, the local public health department will provide directions on what the camp is required to do and the paperwork that will need to be completed.
- The public health department **does not** provide medical/nursing staff to work at the camp during an outbreak.
- Notification of parents/guardians should occur in an efficient and timely manner

Planning in Advance

The best way to manage an outbreak is to be prepared. Here are some things to consider when planning for a possible outbreak:

- At the start of the summer, contact your local public health department for information on preventing the spread of infection, hand washing posters and other resources.
- Make hand washing a part of your camp culture. Have staff and campers use hand sanitizers prior to each meal. **Hand washing is the single most important means of preventing the spread of illnesses.**
- Plan where you will house ill staff/campers away from well staff/campers.
- Staffing ratios will decrease during an outbreak, this will impact the camp programs and affect camper supervision.
- Consider having disposable plates, bowls, cups and utensils and single serving items such as ketchup, salt available in case of an outbreak.
- Cleaning and disinfection of the camp will need to increase. Does the camp have the necessary cleaning supplies and access to laundry facilities? Has staff been trained on how to do this?
- External resources may need to be called in to provide additional support to the camp – food services, cleaning, health care services, etc.

References:

Casey, Mary (2011), *Camp Nursing – Circles of Care*, Volumes.

(Fact Sheet) Canadian Paediatric Society, *Diarrhea and Dehydration: Prevention and Treatment Fact Sheet*, (2008) www.caringforkids.cps.ca.

Ontario Health Protection and Promotion Act, Recreational Camps Regulation Regulations 568 of the revised Regulation of Ontario, 1990 (Revised May 1995).

Simcoe Muskoka Health Department, *Outbreak Management and Control*, December 2005, <http://www.simcoemuskokahealth.org/JFY/Businesses/recreationalcamps/outbreakmanagement.aspx>

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