



NORTHUMBERLAND HILLS HOSPITAL

inspiring strength, dignity and compassion

NEWS RELEASE – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NHH Alerts Public to Cluster of Viral Gastrointestinal Illness – Outbreak Conditions in Effect in Selected Units and the Affected Units Closed to Visitors

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY, Wednesday, March 18, 2009 – Northumberland Hills Hospital (NHH) announced today that it has 15 suspected cases of a viral gastrointestinal illness. Symptoms, which can last for 24-48 hours, include nausea, vomiting and diarrhea. The NHH cases are limited to two in-patient units, namely the In-patient Rehabilitation Unit and the Complex Continuing Care Unit. In an effort to maximize steps to stop the spread of the virus, visits to these two units have been temporarily stopped.

Viral gastrointestinal illnesses are common in the community at this time of year. Cases of the virus were identified at NHH when patients began showing symptoms.

The affected units at NHH are not accepting new admissions and are restricting patient transfers to and from other units. NHH is working closely with the Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge District Health Unit to communicate this information to surrounding facilities, including hospitals, retirement residences and long-term care facilities. All appropriate prevention and control measures are in place, including the temporary change to admission practices referenced above, limits to visitors to the affected areas, staffing adjustments, and public notification. Families of patients on the affected units are being contacted and advised of the temporary visitor restrictions.

NHH remains fully operational and programs and services across the hospital remain unaffected. Visiting hours in all other areas remain open. NHH will provide its next public update when the outbreak is deemed over, no less than 48 hours after no new cases are identified.

Visitors to health-care facilities play a very important role in protecting patient safety and minimizing the spread of infection. A good summary of visitor tips, published recently by the US-based Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology (www.apic.org), is provided below. Hand washing remains the single most effective means of reducing the spread of infection both within the hospital and in the community.

Sanitize hands before and after visiting

Wash or sanitize your hands when entering and leaving the room of the person you are visiting to avoid bringing in and carrying out germs. Insist that health-care providers do the same before caring for your loved one. Clean your hands after sneezing, coughing, touching your eyes, nose, or mouth, after using the restroom and before and after eating and drinking. Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue or your sleeve, and do not sit on patient beds or handle their equipment. Read and follow any instructions posted outside the patient's room.

Refrain from visiting a patient if you are sick

Do not visit the hospital if you are sick or have had any ill symptoms within the last three days including nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, fever (or feeling feverish), uncontrolled cough or rash.

Check first before you bring food, send flowers or take the kids

While flowers, young visitors and home-baked goodies spread cheer, they may not be allowed, so check with the nurse first. Most hospitals prohibit flowers in intensive care units. If you change the water in a vase of flowers, be sure to wash your hands afterward. Bringing food is risky because the patient may be on a special diet or the food could spoil and make the patient sick. Likewise, check with the health-care facility about the rules for children visiting. If you bring youngsters, don't let them play on the floor or bed and have them wash their hands as they enter and leave the room. Make sure the child is free from symptoms of infection (e.g., runny nose, sore throat, rash, cough, etc.)

Special precautions

If the person you are visiting is on "Isolation Precautions," talk to the nurse before entering the room to find out what steps you will have to take, such as wearing a mask or other protective clothing. Also ask for any educational materials that may be available.

Don't contribute to the clutter

Limit the patient's personal items. Less clutter eases the critical job of cleaning hospital rooms. Keep patient items off the floor and away from waste containers.

Visiting more than one

If you are visiting multiple patients (for instance, if you are a pastor), sanitize your hands before and after seeing each patient. Do not share the communion cup and lay the wafer on a paper towel (not directly on the patient's table.) Visit the person in isolation last and follow the precautions specified.

Back at home

Keep the patient healthy back at home. Follow discharge instructions and eliminate germs from the patient's environment by using disinfectants, such as sprays and wipes, to clean hard surfaces often.

For more information please contact Jennifer Gillard at 905-377-7757 or jgillard@nhh.ca.

About Northumberland Hills Hospital – The Northumberland Hills Hospital (NHH) is located approximately 100 kilometres east of Toronto. The 137-bed acute care hospital delivers a broad range of services, including emergency and intensive care, medical/surgical care, complex/long-term care, rehabilitation, palliative care and obstetrical care. A variety of ambulatory care clinics are also offered at NHH. In addition to these, NHH also sponsors a Community Mental Health Centre and an Assertive Community Treatment Team. The hospital serves the catchment area of west Northumberland County. A mixed urban and rural population of approximately 60,000 residents, west Northumberland comprises the Town of Cobourg, the Municipality of Port Hope and the townships of Hamilton, Cramahe and Alnwick/Haldimand. NHH employs close to 600 people and relies on the additional support provided by physicians and volunteers. NHH is an active member of the Central East LHIN. For more information, please visit www.nhh.ca.