



Toronto General Hospital
University Health Network

NEWS RELEASE: FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Toronto General Hospital Emergency Department Reopens

(Toronto, December 13, 2002) – The Emergency Department at Toronto General Hospital (TGH) opened on Friday December 13, 2002 at 12:30 pm. The department was closed Monday December 9 in the evening to walk-in patients, ambulances, and visitors as a result of a Norwalk-like virus outbreak. The Toronto Western Hospital Emergency Department is open.

The TGH Emergency Department was opened 48 hours after any symptoms disappeared in the last patient who was diagnosed with any Norwalk-like symptoms, such as vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal cramps or nausea. The virus, which affected more than 40 patients who came to the Emergency Department during the five days before Monday's closure, along with 20 staff in the Emergency Department, has been contained. The Emergency Department is now accepting new patients.

"The extra vigilance and quick response of our staff helped to contain the outbreak so quickly," explains Dr. Michael Gardam, Director of Infection Prevention and Control at University Health Network. "Staff were very careful about handwashing, and about wearing gowns and gloves. And every couple of hours, housekeeping would get out the mops and buckets and scrub every surface and piece of equipment."

Prior to today's opening, the Emergency Department was cleaned and disinfected from top to bottom to kill the virus. As an added precaution, Emergency staff will continue to limit the spread of the virus by isolating patients who have Norwalk-like symptoms from other patients. Staff will also continue to be diligent about handwashing, and will also wear gowns and gloves, if need be.

Dr. Gardam added that although the Emergency Department is open, the Norwalk virus is still in the community and that people can still be infected. "We must remain vigilant for the duration of this community outbreak."

Symptoms of the Norwalk virus last between 24-48 hours. Although quite contagious, Norwalk Virus is non-lethal and is a common cause of epidemic gastroenteritis in hospitals, nursing homes, and day care centres.

- more -

P.2, TGH Emergency Department Opens

Most commonly, people get Norwalk virus infection through direct contact with someone who has Norwalk-like symptoms. In addition, people can get it by swallowing food or water that has been contaminated with stool from an infected person. Outbreaks have been linked to eating raw shellfish, especially oysters and clams. Contaminated water, ice, eggs, salad ingredients, and ready-to-eat foods are other sources of infection.

The best way to prevent getting a Norwalk virus infection is by:

- Washing hands with soap and warm water after washroom visits and before preparing or eating food;
- Cooking all shellfish thoroughly before eating;
- Washing raw vegetables before eating;
- Disposing of sewage in a sanitary manner;
- Not preparing or touching food if you have any symptoms of the Norwalk-like illness.

People who are healthy, but experience any Norwalk-like symptoms, should call Telehealth Ontario at 1 - 866 - 797 - 0000 for advice, go to a walk-in clinic, see a family physician, or rest at home, drinking clear fluids and eating small amounts of food which do not have high fat or sugar content.

-30-

For further information, please contact:

Alex Radkewycz,
TGH Public Affairs
Phone: 416 - 340 - 3895
Pager: 416 - 980 - 0752