



STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
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In reply, please refer to:
File:

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MEDICAL ADVISORY: NOROVIRUS OUTBREAK KALALAU VALLEY, KAUAI

- DOH has reported an on-going outbreak of Norovirus in visitors to Kauai's Kalalau Valley. More than 2-dozen hikers, campers, and boaters have reported symptoms of acute gastroenteritis with lab-confirmed norovirus infection in at least 4 cases. The outbreak started in late August and new cases continue to be reported.
- Healthcare providers should assess patients with symptoms of acute gastroenteritis for history of visiting Kalalau Valley and its environs, or having contact with ill individuals who visited that area. Samples should be obtained for laboratory confirmation when possible.
- Management is symptomatic. Antibiotics are not indicated for management of norovirus infection.
- Report suspected cases of norovirus to the health department's disease reporting line at 808-586-4586.

Dear Healthcare Provider,

The Hawaii Department of Health (HDOH) is alerting healthcare providers about a norovirus outbreak in visitors to Kauai's Kalalau Valley. Cases currently exceed two dozen and are continuing to rise. Cases include residents of multiple islands in the state of Hawaii as well as mainland visitors. Cases are NOT confined to Kauai residents. Cases are seeking healthcare throughout the state. Of the 4 cases from multiple camping/hiking parties that submitted stool samples for testing, all 4 tested positive for norovirus GII.

HDOH is working with the Department of Land and Natural Resources to control the outbreak, including:

- Closing the Kalalau trail and camping areas for 1 week (visitors are required to obtain a permit)
- Disinfecting restroom facilities in Kalalau Valley
- Issuing news releases notifying the public of risks and preventive measures
- Conducting water and environmental sampling in Kalalau Valley
- On-going surveillance and case investigation.

To date there has been at least one medical evacuation from the valley. Several persons have sought care at emergency departments or urgent care; there have been no hospitalizations or deaths. Because acute gastroenteritis is often not confirmed by laboratory testing or reported to HDOH, the true number of norovirus cases no doubt exceeds the number reported.

HDOH reminds healthcare providers to report all outbreaks of acute gastroenteritis, including suspected outbreaks of norovirus, to HDOH.

Clinical Presentation

After an incubation period of 12–72 hours, norovirus infection presents with an abrupt onset of nausea, vomiting, watery diarrhea, and abdominal pain. Most illnesses are self-limited and typically last 48 to 72 hours. Dehydration can occur and illness may be severe in older adults, infants, and immunocompromised persons. Hiking long distances in warm humid weather can contribute to dehydration.

Norovirus infections are most communicable during the acute stage of the disease, but infected persons can continue to shed the virus for two to three weeks, even after clinical recovery. Transmission requires only a very small viral inoculum.

Norovirus is highly transmissible and can readily spread from person to person, through contaminated food or drink, contaminated surfaces, or through direct contact. Norovirus survives readily in the environment and is relatively resistant to common disinfectants. Therefore, norovirus can spread easily, and can be challenging to control, especially in backcountry settings with limited sanitary facilities and limited water supplies.

Reporting and Surveillance

Confirmed and suspected outbreaks of norovirus are reportable to HDOH.

Laboratory testing confirms the diagnosis of norovirus infection, as symptoms of norovirus alone cannot distinguish it from other gastroenteric viruses (such as rotavirus, sapovirus, astrovirus, and adenovirus) or bacterial causes (such as *Salmonella*). In the setting of this known outbreak, an epidemiologic link to Kalalau Valley or to an ill visitor greatly increases the likelihood of a norovirus diagnosis. At this time, testing of additional cases may not be necessary unless symptoms are atypical, persistent, or severe.

Testing could also be useful in immunocompromised patients.

Prevention and Control

Norovirus is very contagious, and the virus can survive for weeks on surfaces and objects. The infection can spread quickly in settings such as schools and childcare centers, congregate living settings, healthcare facilities, and cruise ships.

It is recommended that ill individuals do **not** prepare, handle food, or care for others when sick. Wait at least 48 hours (2 days) after symptoms stop. This is important if the case works in a restaurant, school, daycare, long-term care facility, or other places where they may expose people to norovirus.

[Contact and standard precautions are recommended](#) when interacting with patients with suspected or confirmed norovirus infection. The most important action is handwashing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds before and after contact with each patient (*hand sanitizers are typically not effective against norovirus*). In addition, gloves and gowns should be worn to reduce the likelihood of exposure to infectious vomitus or fecal material when caring for patients.

If there is an anticipated risk of splashes to the face during the care of patients, particularly among those who are vomiting, surgical or procedure masks and eye protection or a full-face shield should also be used.

Thorough cleaning and disinfection of examination rooms, bathrooms, and other “high touch” surface areas while using personal protective equipment such as gloves, gowns, and masks should be performed after a patient with confirmed or suspected norovirus infection has been seen. [Disinfectants with activity against norovirus](#) should be used for cleaning. If such disinfectants are not available, a bleach solution with a concentration of 1,000 to 5,000 ppm (5 to 25 tablespoons of household bleach [5% to 8%] per gallon of water) should be used.

Other recommended control measures vary by setting, but typically include:

- Exclusion of ill people from school, work, and other communal activities for at least 48 hours after symptoms have resolved; and
- Grouping or cohorting of ill and well persons (i.e., keeping ill and well persons apart), especially if exclusion from the setting is not an option.

Additional Resources:

- HDOH: [Norovirus | Disease Outbreak Control Division \(hawaii.gov\)](#)
- CDC: [Norovirus | Norovirus | CDC](#)

For questions regarding norovirus, or to report suspected cases of norovirus please contact HDOH’s disease reporting line at (808) 586-4586.

Sincerely,



Sarah K. Kemble, M.D.
State Epidemiologist