

Norovirus

Date: 8/19/2005

The norovirus, previously known as the Norwalk-like virus, made headline news when hundreds of cruise passengers and crewmembers suddenly became ill while out at sea. It was determined that the numerous outbreaks, which occurred on several ships and cruises, were all caused by the norovirus.

Norovirus infections attack the gastrointestinal tract and are caused by the consumption of contaminated food and water or contact with an infected person or contaminated surface. According to the U.S. FDA, the most common source of outbreaks is water from wells, recreational lakes, municipal supplies, swimming pools, and most recently, water stored aboard cruise ships. Some foods may become easily contaminated, as well, including shellfish and salads.

Norovirus, or Norwalk-like virus, gets its name from the first known outbreak, which occurred in 1968 in Norwalk, Ohio. The symptoms for infection with norovirus, as reported by the CDC, include “nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea accompanied by abdominal cramps.” Other possible symptoms are fever or chills, headache, and muscle aches. Symptoms usually begin within 24 to 48 hours after ingestion of the virus and can last for two to three days. According to the U.S. FDA, other common names for the norovirus infection include food poisoning, food infection, viral gastroenteritis, and acute nonbacterial gastroenteritis.

The “CDC estimates that 23 million cases of acute gastroenteritis are due to the norovirus infection, and it is now thought that at least 50% of all foodborne outbreaks of gastroenteritis can be attributed to noroviruses.” (www.cdc.gov)

Copyright 2005 Aerotech Laboratories