

Updates: Norovirus on Main Campus

Updates

Update at 12 p.m. on Thursday, Sept. 30 From Ranit Mishori, M.D., MHS, FAAFP, Professor of Family Medicine, Vice President and Chief Public Health Officer

Over the last two weeks, we have had a total of 145 students, faculty and staff who have reported symptoms that are consistent with a viral gastroenteritis. Samples tested at MedStar Georgetown University Hospital and others sent to the DC Department of Health have confirmed the presence of norovirus. The number of new cases is low and continuing to decrease.

While it is reassuring to know the likely pathogen responsible for this outbreak, we still do not know the source. At this time, we have found no link to a food source or any of the dining venues on campus. Due to the confirmed testing results identifying norovirus and the classic features of the illness, *salmonella* is no longer suspected as the cause for this GI illness.

In general, and as a means of preventing the spread of different kinds of infectious organisms, we continue to urge students, faculty and staff to practice good hand hygiene, frequently washing hands with soap and water, which is more effective than alcohol-based sanitizers in eliminating norovirus. We will continue to clean high-touch surfaces in residence halls, dining areas and other spaces across campus.

Update at 8 p.m. on Tuesday, Sept. 28

Additional frequently asked questions (FAQs) have been added to the [FAQ page](#), below.

Update at 9 a.m. on Monday, Sept. 27

Over the last week, 130 students, faculty and staff have reported symptoms that could be consistent with norovirus. The vast majority of cases were resolved 12 hours after onset of symptoms and did not require medical treatment. One student did require in-patient support for rehydration.

We continue to work with DC Health and follow its recommendations. We have more than 24 staff dedicated full-time to cleaning high-touch surfaces in residence halls, dining areas and other spaces across campus. Support services for residential students continue.

Update at 9 a.m. on Sunday, Sept. 26

We continue to see a marked decrease in new cases. This morning, our facilities team is cleaning and sanitizing a few remaining rooms of affected individual students. Our facilities team will continue deep cleaning of common or shared spaces in our campus residential facilities. We continue to encourage members of our community to stay hydrated and practice good hand hygiene, washing frequently with soap and water. If you are unwell, please stay home, avoid social gatherings and events, and do not attend class or arrive for work.

Meal delivery service for impacted students is available until 8:00 PM so students can receive nutrition and hydration while limiting their exposure to others. Affected students may request general support, including meal delivery and hydration, by attesting to their symptoms via GU360.

Update at 10:30 a.m. on Saturday, Sept. 25

We are continuing to monitor reported cases of individuals with symptoms of norovirus on Main Campus. We are focused on preventing additional transmission and supporting affected students. If you are unwell, please stay home, avoid social gatherings or events, and do not attend class or arrive for work. Please report any symptoms [via the GU360 Daily Health Attestation](#). Students do not need a doctor's note for a medical-related class absence. Please be in touch with your faculty instructor to receive instructions for a missed class.

On Friday evening, our facilities team began deep cleaning and sanitizing of rooms of affected individuals and all common or shared spaces in our campus residential facilities. They have completed 46 student rooms and will be continuing cleaning throughout the day on Saturday.

We are also extending the hours of our quarantine meal delivery service to 8:00 PM so students can receive nutrition and hydration while limiting their exposure to others. Affected students may request general support, including meal delivery and hydration, by attesting to their symptoms via GU360.

Update at 11 a.m. on Friday, Sept. 24

We are continuing to monitor reported cases of individuals with symptoms fitting the GI illness on Main Campus. We have seen a marked decrease over the past two days. As of 10 AM this morning, DC Health has collected 62 surveys from students and community members reporting symptoms.

We continue to coordinate with DC Health to ensure the safety of our community and to investigate the source of the illness. At this time, we have not identified a common food source among impacted individuals, which include students and staff living both on- and off-campus. We are continuing our increased cleaning and disinfection of high-touch areas in residence halls and dining spaces.

Update at 5:15 p.m. on Thursday, Sept. 23

We continue to see a substantial decrease in the number of new cases reported. We are continuing to investigate the source of the illness and work with DC Health. We are also maintaining our additional health and safety procedures including increasing cleaning and disinfection of high-touch areas in residence halls and dining spaces.

Update at 10:45 a.m. on Thursday, Sept. 23

We are continuing to monitor reported cases with symptoms fitting the GI illness on Main Campus. We have seen a decrease in reporting of active illness in the last 16 hours. As of 9 AM this morning, DC Health has collected 42 surveys from students reporting symptoms. Most students are reporting short-lived symptoms and no students have been hospitalized, though a small number have been evaluated and provided with rehydration at local emergency departments.

Update at 5 p.m. on Wednesday, Sept. 22

Georgetown University is continuing to coordinate with DC Health. We are surveying affected individuals to identify any commonalities and are collecting stool samples to determine potential

pathogens. While further evaluation and testing are needed, preliminary information indicates that the illness is not caused by person-to-person transmission.

Out of an abundance of caution, earlier today we removed pre-packaged and pre-washed food items that are commonly associated with foodborne illnesses from our dining facilities and continued our additional cleaning and disinfection of residence halls and dining areas.

Our Care Navigators are continuing to provide outreach to affected individuals and our Student Affairs team is providing additional support. We are encouraged that most students are reporting short-lived symptoms and that no students have been hospitalized, though a small number have been evaluated and provided with rehydration at local emergency departments.

Update at 9 a.m. on Wednesday, Sept. 22

We received additional reports overnight and are working as quickly as we can to care for the students, confirm the cause of the illness and establish whether their cases are connected. Out of an abundance of caution, we have increased the frequency of cleaning across campus, including in residence halls and dining locations.

Messages to the Community

Message to the Community and Families at 6:25 p.m. on Friday, Sept. 24

From Ranit Mishori, M.D., MHS, FAAFP, Professor of Family Medicine, Vice President and Chief Public Health Officer

As you know, since Tuesday, September 21, we have been investigating a gastrointestinal illness that has impacted numerous members of our community. This afternoon, testing from two samples revealed that the illness was caused by norovirus, which can spread from person to person. We are waiting for the results of additional samples.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), norovirus can spread “if you eat food or drink liquids that are contaminated with the norovirus, touch surfaces or objects contaminated with norovirus and then put your fingers in your mouth, or have direct contact with someone who is infected with norovirus.”

If you have symptoms, please limit your exposure with other individuals for 48 hours following the end of your symptoms. This will help prevent person-to-person spread of the virus and ensure the safety of our community.

While we have seen a marked decrease in severe cases from earlier this week, we have had more than 90 students report symptoms that could be consistent with norovirus. Fewer than 15 were transported to area emergency departments, and a smaller subset of those individuals received IV rehydration. No students required hospitalization.

We are continuing to take appropriate steps to respond to the needs of our community and to prevent the spread of the virus. We are in regular contact with DC Health and continue to follow its guidance. Following a visit from DC Health, we have determined that campus dining locations, including Leo O'Donovan Hall, can safely remain open.

Some immediate measures we are taking include:

- Additional increased cleaning and disinfection of high-touch areas in residence halls, dining spaces, libraries, academic buildings, Yates Field House and all other University spaces.
- Starting tonight the Office of Planning and Facilities Management will begin deep cleaning and sanitizing of rooms of affected individuals and all common or shared spaces in on campus residential facilities.

Norovirus is a highly contagious group of viruses that cause symptoms including nausea, vomiting, diarrhea and stomach cramps. Individuals may also have low-grade fever, chills, headache, fatigue and muscle aches. A person usually develops symptoms 12 to 48 hours after being exposed to norovirus. Most people with norovirus illness get better within 1 to 3 days. [A fact sheet on norovirus](#) is available on the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) website.

- Follow [CDC guidelines](#), including staying hydrated and practicing good hand hygiene, washing with soap and water frequently or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- If you are unwell, please stay home and do not attend class or arrive for work. Please report any symptoms [via the GU360 Daily Health Attestation](#). **Students do not need a doctor's note for a medical-related class absence.** Please be in touch with your faculty instructor to receive instructions for a missed class.
- If you are experiencing symptoms of severe stomach pain, nausea, vomiting or diarrhea, please seek medical treatment.
 - Students can contact the Student Health Center at 202-687-2200 from 9 a.m. – 12 p.m. on Saturday, September 25. For emergencies after hours, students can reach an on-call Student Health Center clinician via instructions at the same number.
 - If students or families have a question or concern they can contact the Division of Student Affairs at studentaffairs@georgetown.edu.
 - Faculty or staff experiencing symptoms should contact your health care provider or seek immediate treatment. Please also contact the public health team at chiefpublichealthofficer@georgetown.edu and your supervisor.

Even if you do not currently have symptoms, we advise students to limit social gatherings where norovirus could spread. If you do gather, please take responsibility for your own health and the health of others by practicing strict hand hygiene and maintaining adequate distance.

We will continue to provide additional updates on our [public health incident webpage](#). We recognize this news is distressing and we urge you to seek out [resources](#) to ensure your emotional and mental well-being. Working together we can ensure the health and safety of our community.

Message to the Community and Families at 1:04 p.m. on Wednesday, Sept. 22

From Ranit Mishori, M.D., MHS, FAAFP, Professor of Family Medicine, Vice President and Chief Public Health Officer

I am writing to provide an update on the gastrointestinal illness impacting members of our community that was shared in a message last night. Since early afternoon Tuesday, September

21, a number of individuals on the Main Campus have reported symptoms including severe stomach pain, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea. These students are being treated and receiving support, and are recovering from their symptoms. We will be updating this page as the situation continues.

We continue to work with DC Health to confirm the cause of these cases or how these incidents may be connected. They are likely due to an infectious organism, but do not appear to be related to COVID-19 or influenza (flu). Out of an abundance of caution, we have initiated additional health and safety procedures including increasing cleaning and disinfection in high-touch areas in residence halls and dining spaces.

- As a reminder, please stay hydrated and practice good hand hygiene, washing with soap and water frequently or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- If you are unwell, please stay home and do not attend class or arrive for work. Please report any symptoms [via the GU360 Daily Health Attestation](#). Students do not need a doctor's note for a medical-related class absence. Please be in touch with your faculty instructor to receive instructions for a missed class.
- If you are experiencing symptoms of severe stomach pain, nausea, vomiting or diarrhea, please seek medical treatment.
- Students can contact the Student Health Center at 202-687-2200 from 8am until 5pm. For emergencies after hours, students can reach an on-call Student Health Center clinician via instructions at the same number.
- If students or families have a question or concern they can contact the Division of Student Affairs at studentaffairs@georgetown.edu or 202-687-4056.
- Faculty or staff should contact your health care provider or seek immediate treatment. Please also contact the public health team at chiefpublichealthofficer@georgetown.edu and your supervisor.

We encourage you to bookmark our Public Health page for updates as we continue to monitor the situation.

Message to the Community and Families at 10:03 p.m. on Tuesday, Sept. 21

From Ranit Mishori, M.D., MHS, FAAFP, Professor of Family Medicine, Vice President and Chief Public Health Officer

Since early afternoon Tuesday, September 21, approximately 12 students on our Main Campus have reported symptoms including severe stomach pains, vomiting and diarrhea. The students are being treated and we are working to understand if the cases are connected, and if so what the cause is.

If you are not feeling well and experiencing symptoms of severe stomach pains, vomiting or diarrhea, please seek medical treatment.

- If you are on campus or in the surrounding neighborhoods and experiencing severe symptoms and need assistance, please call the Georgetown University Police Department (GUPD) at 202-687-4343. If you live beyond the Georgetown neighborhood and need assistance, please call 911.

- Students can contact the Student Health Center at 202-687-2200 from 8am until 5pm. For emergencies after hours, students can reach an on-call Student Health Center clinician via instructions at the same number.
- Students may also go to the MedStar Georgetown University Hospital emergency room or the hospital/health care facility closest to where they reside.
- Faculty or staff should contact your health care provider or seek immediate treatment. Please also contact the public health team at chiefpublichealthofficer@georgetown.edu.

At this time we do not know the cause of the symptoms, but it is prudent to assume they are related to an infectious process. Please be aware that the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has [reported](#) a national outbreak of Salmonella from an unknown source. Salmonella is a bacteria that affects the intestinal system and can cause fever, diarrhea, vomiting and abdominal cramps.

While we do not know the cause of this outbreak, if you are experiencing symptoms, please limit your contact with others and keep yourself well hydrated. As a reminder, please practice good hand hygiene, washing with soap and water frequently or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

Our Public Health team is in touch with the DC Department of Health. We will continue to monitor this situation and provide updates as needed.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is gastroenteritis?

Gastroenteritis is a medical term that literally means inflammation of the lining of the digestive system. It can affect people at all ages and can be caused by many different types of infectious organisms (viruses, bacteria or parasites). Viral gastroenteritis (“stomach flu” or “stomach bug”) due to viruses such as norovirus or rotavirus are likely to spread at places with a lot of people, such as schools, nursing homes, cruise ships and daycare centers, among others. Common symptoms include: abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting, loss of appetite, diarrhea, fever, headache and body aches.

How long could I be infected before I start getting symptoms?

A person usually develops symptoms 12 to 48 hours after being exposed to norovirus. Most people with norovirus illness get better within 1 to 3 days.

What kinds of tests are necessary for people with symptoms of gastroenteritis?

Early on in an outbreak it is important to determine the causative organism. When it comes to gastroenteritis, stool collection is key for checking for a variety of viruses, bacteria and parasites that may cause such symptoms. Once an organism has been identified as present in several samples, there is no need to test the stool of every single individual with similar symptoms.

In some situations, when symptoms are severe or there is concern for other causes, some blood tests or diagnostic testing (e.g an X-ray or abdominal ultrasound) may be required for affected individuals.

Does everyone with gastroenteritis symptoms (nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal pain) need to be seen by a clinician?

The vast majority of people will have a self-limited disease and will not require clinical care or assessment by a physician. It is important that you keep yourself well hydrated to avoid the need for IV rehydration. If symptoms are severe, or there are signs of dehydration (e.g dizziness), the affected individual may need to receive IV hydration.

If the symptoms do not go away, or worsen, rather than improve over time, talking to a clinician is important.

If your symptoms are not severe, and you can stay home to recover, please do the following:

- If you cannot keep any food or drink down, sip small amounts of water or suck ice chips every 15 minutes.
- Try to sip clear liquids every 15 minutes, such as water, sports drinks, flat soda, clear broth, flavored ice, popsicles or apple juice. Do not drink citrus juices or milk.
- Once you can tolerate clear liquids, try to eat small amounts of bland foods. For example: bananas, rice, applesauce, toast, crackers.
- Avoid eating dairy products, sugary, or fatty foods, alcohol, caffeine, spicy food.

What if my roommate is sick?

Norovirus can be spread by person-to-person surface transmission. To help prevent transmission, the CDC recommends thorough handwashing, cleaning and disinfecting shared surfaces and washing used laundry.

If I am living with someone who has symptoms, can I be temporarily housed in a different location?

Alternative university accommodations are not available at this time, but rooms of affected individuals will be deep cleaned and sanitized by our facilities staff.

What cleaning protocols have been instituted in response to this outbreak?

Dining Services: Hoya Hospitality has rigorous cleaning protocols as part of daily operations. In response to COVID-19, additional cleaning measures were taken, including increased frequency for high touch surfaces, specialized cleaning chemicals designed to protect against specific viruses, and utilization of a Clorox360 mister to sanitize all public spaces and employee locker rooms. In response to outbreak of norovirus, cleaning frequencies have been increased further, utilizing the same precautionary protocols, chemicals and equipment currently in place due to COVID-19.

Residence Halls/Campus Spaces: Our Facilities team has deep cleaned and sanitized the rooms of affected individuals and all common or shared spaces in our campus residential facilities. We have also increased the frequency of cleaning by temporarily deploying an additional 25 custodians to residence halls. To supplement the anti-bacterial wipes already provided throughout the campus, we have made additional sanitizing products available in the lounges and kitchenettes of our Residence Halls. A Clorox 360 mister has been deployed to sanitize bathrooms, locker rooms and other common areas throughout campus.

Is it safe to eat at campus dining locations?

Following a visit from DC Health, we have determined that campus dining locations, including Leo O'Donovan Hall, can safely remain open.

What kind of training, if any, do food workers get, to prevent foodborne illnesses?

The Hoya Hospitality team undergoes recurring training on food safety. Both front line associates and managers undergo annual food safety training, participate in weekly SAFE briefs and training around revolving food safety topics and encounter daily postings encouraging proper food safety behaviors. Additionally, Hoya Hospitality ensures there is at least one certified ServSafe Manager on staff for every meal period.

SOURCE: [Updates: Norovirus on Main Campus - Georgetown University](#)