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Health Advisory: Diarrheal Illness Associated with Seneca Lake State Park
Preventing Further Spread of Illness in the School Setting

Please distribute to school district superintendent, school administrator, health office, food service, home economics department, teachers, and physical education department

Dear Colleague:

As you are probably aware from the news media reports, the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) and local health departments (LHDs) are investigating a large outbreak of gastrointestinal illness associated with Seneca Lake State Park. As of late August, more than thirty LHDs have received over 3,000 reports of diarrheal illness, primarily in the western and central regions of the state.

The most common symptoms reported by individuals are diarrhea, abdominal cramping, nausea, vomiting, fever, headache, and loss of appetite. Over 600 of the cases have been laboratory-confirmed as cryptosporidiosis, although there have been approximately 15 reports of co-infection with other organisms.

Cryptosporidiosis is spread from ill individuals or from food or water contaminated with the parasite. Either drinking water or recreational water can become contaminated. The usual incubation period (time from exposure to onset of symptoms) for cryptosporidiosis is 7 days, but can range from 2 to 14 days. Persons infected with cryptosporidiosis shed the oocysts in stool for an average of 7 days after symptoms resolve. Enclosed is a Fact Sheet regarding cryptosporidiosis from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

During this time period of significant increased diarrheal illness in the community, schools should ensure the following infection control measures are carefully followed to help prevent the spread of cryptosporidiosis and other diarrheal illnesses in the school setting:

General Recommendations:

- The school nurse should reinforce the need for students and staff to report any gastrointestinal illness to the nursing office at the first sign of such illness.
- Students and staff should be counseled regarding careful handwashing practices, especially after each toilet visit and before handling food for themselves or others.
- Students in the lower elementary grades may need verbal reminders or staff observation of handwashing.

- Schools should ensure that there are adequate supplies of liquid soap and paper towels for handwashing. Since waterless hand cleansers are not as effective in removing the *Cryptosporidium* parasite from hands, soap and water are the preferred method for hand hygiene in the context of community cryptosporidiosis outbreaks.
- Schools should ensure restroom cleanliness is maintained.
- Schools should notify the local health department immediately of any increases in diarrheal illnesses in the school.

Recommendations for Students and Staff with Diarrheal Illness:

- Students with diarrheal illness should be excluded until symptoms resolve.
- Individuals who have diarrheal illness should consult their health care provider as necessary.
- Individuals who have recovered from diarrheal illness should follow careful handwashing practices.
- Food service workers with any diarrheal illness should be excluded from work until symptoms resolve. Additionally, workers with amebiasis, *Shigella*, *Salmonella*, *E. coli* O157, cholera or typhoid are required to have two negative stool cultures/examinations prior to returning to work.
- Any other staff members who have diarrheal illness should follow careful handwashing practices and should not engage in any food handling or food preparation activities.
- Individuals who have diarrheal illness should not use school recreational water facilities (e.g., pools) while ill. In addition, individuals who have recovered from infection with cryptosporidiosis should not use school recreational water facilities for two weeks after the resolution of symptoms.

The above guidelines apply to developmentally typical school-aged children. Younger children and children in diapers at any age are a greater risk for the spread of diarrheal illnesses. Thus, the following stricter infection control measures are appropriate for developmentally disabled school-aged children in diapers:

- Schools should clearly separate diapering and food-handling areas and responsibilities.
- Disposable gloves should be used when changing diapers, and disposable paper should be used to cover diaper-changing areas. Hands should be washed thoroughly after gloves are removed.
- If a developmentally disabled school-aged child in diapers has gastrointestinal illness associated with Seneca Lake State Park or has cryptosporidiosis, enhanced environmental disinfection measures are needed. Although no disinfectant is guaranteed to be completely effective against *Cryptosporidium*, hydrogen peroxide (3%) is usually effective. Schools should clean and disinfect toys and tabletops at least twice daily. Diaper-changing areas should be disinfected after each use. Dishwasher-safe toys may be washed in a commercial dishwasher that has a dry cycle or a final rinse that exceed 113° F for 20 minutes, or 122° F for 5 minutes, or 162° F for 1 minute. Cloth toys may be washed and heat-dried in a clothes dryer for 30 minutes.

If you have any questions, please contact your local health department or the New York State Department of Health Bureau of Communicable Disease Control at 518-473-4439. We thank you for your efforts to prevent additional spread of illness in the school setting.

Attachment: CDC Cryptosporidiosis Fact Sheet