

**Clinical Observations and Notes**  
**February 24, 2004**

**Nursing Home Readmissions After Gastrointestinal Illness**

The recent outbreak of significant gastrointestinal illness at area hospitals has prompted nursing homes to question when afflicted patients should be admitted or readmitted to their facilities.

The Office of Health Care Quality, DHMH, has been working closely with the Office of Community Health, DHMH, on this issue. Current science suggests, per the CDC website, [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) that a patient may be contagious for up to 72 hours following cessation of symptoms. Evidence is less clear but there is the suggestion that patients may be contagious for up to two weeks once they become asymptomatic.

While the Office of Health Care Quality will continue to enforce regulations related to the admission and readmission of patients to Long Term Care facilities, we recognize that the nature of this outbreak presents unique challenges to Medical Directors, Administrators and Directors of Nursing (DON) since it is the elderly infirm patient who is most likely to be significantly affected by this virus.

Therefore we urge facilities to develop a plan to regard when patients will be admitted or readmitted to a facility after a presumed Norwalk virus infection. The fact that there is a possibility that a patient may still be contagious does not, per se, preclude admission to a facility. As would be the case of a patient who develops gastrointestinal illness while in the facility, appropriate measures should be instituted for protection of residents and staff.

The Medical Director's role in this situation is critical and he/she should be providing ongoing advice and guidance to the facility Administrator and DON. The Office of Health Care Quality expects that there will be thoughtful analysis of the clinical evidence in each case in determining whether a patient is admitted or readmitted to a facility.

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