



Government of the District of Columbia  
Department of Health



Center for Policy, Planning and Evaluation Administration  
Division of Epidemiology – Disease Surveillance and Investigation

January 13, 2017

Dear Parent/Guardian:

This is to advise you that a number of students at Lafayette Elementary School have been sick with 'gastroenteritis' (nausea, vomiting and/or diarrhea).

Gastroenteritis is caused most commonly by viruses and bacteria. Viral gastroenteritis often causes large numbers of people to be affected in a short period of time because the viruses involved are highly infectious and pass very easily from person to person. Bacterial gastroenteritis is less readily passed from person to person than viral gastroenteritis, but large numbers of people may be affected if food or water becomes contaminated.

There are many different types of viruses and bacteria that can cause gastroenteritis. Symptoms may include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal cramps, and fever. Depending on the specific virus or bacteria, it can take anywhere from one day to several weeks for symptoms to develop. The illness usually lasts a few days to a week. Washing hands and thoroughly cooking food are extremely important in preventing the spread of illness. Cleaning contaminated surfaces is also important in preventing the spread of viral gastroenteritis. Viruses and bacteria are present in the diarrhea of infected persons while they are sick and for up to a week or two after symptoms end. Gastroenteritis is the result of bacteria or viruses passing from stools or soiled fingers from one person to the mouth of the other, mainly due to inadequate hygiene or poor handwashing habits.

**Students with viral gastroenteritis should not return to school until they have been asymptomatic for at least 24 hours.**

If your child should have any of these symptoms, contact your healthcare provider to obtain a medical evaluation. If possible, request that the physician collect a stool sample during the evaluation to aid in rapid identification of the agent. Also, please notify your child's school nurse at 202-724-8961 that you are seeing a physician.

Sincerely,

John O. Davies-Cole, PhD, MPH  
State Epidemiologist