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NSW Health warns viral gastroenteritis outbreaks on the rise in childcare centres and aged care facilities

South Eastern Sydney Local Health District is warning the peak of the viral gastroenteritis season is approaching, with recent increases in cases in the community, childcare centres and aged care facilities.

Professor Mark Ferson, Director, Public Health Unit, said outbreaks of viral gastroenteritis occur seasonally, and this is when rotavirus and norovirus are commonly circulating in the community.

A second peak of viral gastroenteritis is usually observed at the beginning of each year, coinciding with the intake of new children to early childhood centres.

“Although the cause of most outbreaks in institutions is not diagnosed, all outbreaks occurring in institutions in the past month appear to have been caused by viruses that spread easily from person to person,” Professor Ferson said.

“Symptoms can include nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, fever, abdominal pain, headache, and muscle aches and usually last between one and two days, sometimes longer,” he said.

“Illness can worsen quickly in children and the elderly, so if people are concerned they should see their local GP.”

In South Eastern Sydney, the Public Health Unit received reports of five gastroenteritis outbreaks in childcare centres and aged care facilities during September.

“The best defence is to wash your hands thoroughly with soap and running water for at least 10 seconds before handling and eating food, and always wash your hands after using the toilet or changing nappies,” Professor Ferson said.

“We advise staying home from work and keeping children home from school or childcare when sick. If your work involves handling food, or looking after children, the elderly or patients, do not return to work until 48 hours after symptoms have stopped. Protect the elderly in aged care facilities by not visiting if you or your children are affected by gastro.”

For more information,

visit <http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/gastroenteritis/Pages/default.aspx>

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