



NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE
Thomas Farley, M.D., M.P.H.
Commissioner

2010 Health Alert #1 Citywide Increase in Viral Gastrointestinal Illness

Please Distribute to All Clinical Staff in Emergency Medicine, Pediatrics, Primary Care, Infectious Diseases, Internal Medicine, Family Medicine, Laboratory Medicine, and Infection Control Staff

- **Visits to emergency departments (ED) for vomiting or diarrhea are 58% higher compared to those in November indicating the annual arrival of viral gastroenteritis in the city.**
- **Report any outbreaks (e.g. daycare, school, nursing homes) by calling:**
During business hours: 212-788-9830
After hours, contact the Poison Control Center: 800-222-1222

January 7, 2010

Dear Colleagues,

Compared to early November the Health Department has detected a 58% increase in ED visits among patients complaining of vomiting or diarrhea signaling the annual arrival of norovirus, a viral gastrointestinal (GI) agent. This level of activity among ED visits is typically seen at this time of year for GI illness. In addition, outbreaks of gastrointestinal illness have been reported in group settings, including schools and daycares. Specimens from one of these outbreaks have preliminarily tested positive for norovirus. The attached figure presents rates of gastrointestinal ED visits by age group.

Please emphasize the following to your patients (or for children, their parents or guardians) who present with symptoms consistent with a viral GI illness:

- Viral GI agents are highly transmissible. Wash hands thoroughly!!!
- Viral GI illnesses are self-limited; there is no need for antibiotic treatment.
- Limit exposure to vomitus. Wear gloves during clean-up and use paper towels (not a reusable mop). If children are present, ensure that they do not touch the vomitus and wash their hands and face thoroughly with soap and water.
- Viral GI agents are hardy and can persist in the environment; clean thoroughly any areas that may have become contaminated with a 10% bleach solution.
- **Keep acutely ill children home from school and daycare. Staff in daycare or medical care settings, and employees who handle food in commercial food establishments must stay home from work while acutely ill. Ill persons should ideally stay home for at least two days after illness ends.**

Sincerely,

Sharon Balter

Sharon Balter, MD
Bureau of Communicable Disease

Vasudha Reddy

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Bureau of Communicable Disease

Weekly Rate of Gastro-intestinal Syndrome Visits to NYC Emergency Departments July 2008 - January 2010

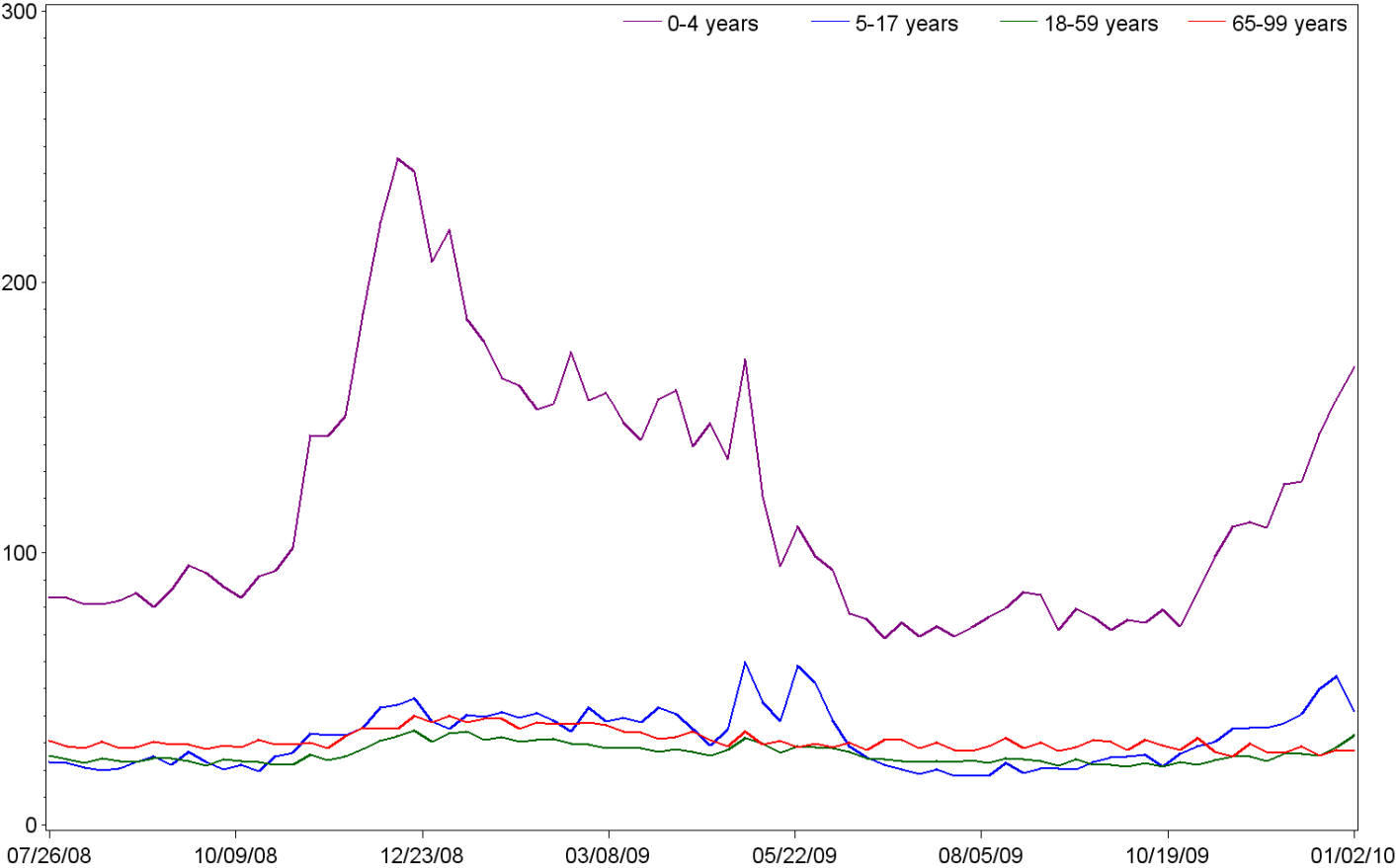


Figure- Rates of NYC Emergency Department visits for Gastrointestinal Syndrome, July 2008- December 2009 (rates are per 100,000 population).

