

#### RELATED TERMS

- Disease plan
- Norovirus



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- Emergency Management
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## LESSON LEARNED

### School Safety: Preparing for a Building-Wide Disease Outbreak

#### SUMMARY

School administrators should consider developing a building-level disease plan to use in the event of a building-wide outbreak.

#### DESCRIPTION

On Wednesday, December 13, 2006, 90 students stayed home sick from Newtown Elementary School in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, and approximately 30 went home sick during the school day. Approximately 150 students (about 20% of the student population) stayed home sick on Thursday morning, and another 90 went home sick during the day. Newtown Elementary School officials contacted the Bucks County Department of Health because the number of sick students was much larger than average, and the situation seemed unique and persistent.

Department of Health officials inspected the school building on Wednesday and Thursday. They identified the cause of the illnesses as a norovirus, a highly contagious virus causing acute gastroenteritis. Based on this finding, Newtown Elementary School officials sanitized the school on Wednesday and Thursday and cancelled all classes and activities on Friday. The situation returned to normal the following Monday.

At the time of the viral outbreak, Bucks County had a district-level disease plan for situations involving the entire school district, but Newtown Elementary School did not have a building-level disease plan. For this reason, Newtown Elementary School administrators were forced to improvise plans as the situation progressed. School administrators should consider developing and exercising a building-level disease plan. Such plans are only one important element of an effective response to a building-wide outbreak.

#### CITATION

Klein, Mark J. Superintendent, Bucks County School District. Interview with *Lessons Learned Information Sharing*, 18 Dec 2006.

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