

**JOINT MEDIA RELEASE
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
JOINTLY ISSUED BY NEA, MOH, AVA & PUB**

**SURGE OF PATIENTS WITH GASTROENTERITIS
AT OWEN ROAD AREA**

Premises owners and members of the public are reminded to maintain high hygiene standards

Singapore, 24 May 2016 – The Ministry of Health (MOH), National Environment Agency (NEA), Agri-Food & Veterinary Authority of Singapore (AVA) and PUB, Singapore's national water agency (PUB) are investigating a surge of patients with gastroenteritis in the Owen Road area. As of 23 May 2016, more than 180 cases have been reported. Investigation into the possible source has not concluded; however, as a precautionary measure, NEA will close Pek Kio Market and Food Centre for a thorough cleaning and disinfection from 25 May to 26 May 2016. The market will re-open on 27 May 2016.

2. On 19 May 2016, MOH was alerted by a general practitioner at Owen Road that the clinic had seen an unusual increase in the number of cases of gastroenteritis since 16 May. Further investigations found that other clinics in the area had experienced a similar increase. In all, more than 180 cases had sought medical treatment for symptoms such as diarrhoea, vomiting, fever and abdominal pain in the past week. The cases typically recovered within a few days. There were seven patients who are warded at Tan Tock Seng Hospital for observation. All of them are recovering well.

3. NEA, MOH, AVA and PUB had commenced investigations into the cause immediately on 19 May, including collecting food and environmental samples from food outlets in the Owen Road area, as well as interviewing affected cases and screening stool samples from the affected cases. Our investigations found that the majority of the cases stayed near or visited the Owen Road area. Many of them had also patronised the Pek Kio Market and Food Centre, although the investigations did not identify any specific food stall that could be the source of the outbreak.

4. Stool samples collected from cases tested positive for Rotavirus (commonly known as "gastric flu"). Please refer to Annex A for more information on Rotavirus.

5. During the period of closure, stallholders and Tanjong Pagar Town Council's cleaning contractor will conduct a thorough cleaning of the centre as follows:

- Cleaning of all utensils (i.e. plates, bowls, cutlery) with food-grade disinfectants;
- Disinfection of all dining tables and chairs, food preparation surfaces, walls and floors; and
- Disinfection of the public toilets, including all toilet fixtures such as taps, door handles and wash basins.

6. MOH and NEA have briefed the stallholders this afternoon on the details of the cleaning and disinfection work. NEA will also be issuing advisories to other stakeholders in the area to remind all premises owners to maintain high hygiene standards of public contact surfaces.

Public Advisory

7. As those infected can transmit the virus to their family members and close contacts, personal hygiene is important. MOH and NEA would like to remind members of the public who have visited the Owen Road area to monitor their health status closely. They should seek medical attention early if they experience any gastroenteritis symptoms (i.e., diarrhoea, vomiting, fever or abdominal pain). Members of the public should also take the necessary precautions, such as washing or sanitizing their hands regularly, and using service utensils when sharing food.

8. For health related queries, members of the public can contact MOH at 1800-2254122. For feedback on any hygiene lapses, the public may contact NEA at the 24-hr hotline 1800-2255 632.

- End -

Rotavirus Gastroenteritis

Rotavirus Gastroenteritis is an inflammation of the stomach and intestines caused by a virus called rotavirus, resulting in vomiting, diarrhoea, fever and abdominal pain. Gastroenteritis may be caused by:

- infection by certain bacteria, viruses or parasites; or
- certain medications or medical conditions.

Viral gastroenteritis is an infection caused by many different viruses including rotaviruses, noroviruses, adenoviruses, sapoviruses and astroviruses. It is sometimes called “gastric flu” although it is not related to influenza.

Symptoms

A rotavirus infection usually starts within two days of exposure to the virus. Symptoms include vomiting, diarrhoea, fever and abdominal cramps. Additional symptoms may include loss of appetite and dehydration.

For people with healthy immune system, rotavirus disease is self-limited, lasting for only a few days.

How Gastric Flu Spreads

The viruses that cause gastroenteritis are primarily spread in several ways, including:

- Eating food or drinking liquids that are contaminated.
- Touching surfaces or objects that are contaminated, and then placing their hand in their mouth.
- Having direct contact with another person who is infected and showing symptoms (e.g. when caring for someone with illness, or sharing foods or eating utensils with someone who is ill).

What to Do If You Have Gastric Flu

Gastroenteritis is usually brief in healthy persons. The most serious health effect is dehydration. Persons become dehydrated because they are unable to replace the fluids they have lost due to vomiting and diarrhoea. The symptoms for dehydration include dry or sticky mouth, thirst, lethargy, constipation and little or no urination.

This is commonly seen among the very young, the elderly, and persons with weakened immune systems. Those who become dehydrated should seek medical attention immediately.

Those who have gastroenteritis can reduce their risk of becoming dehydrated by drinking oral rehydration fluids, juice, or water.

Those who are diagnosed with gastroenteritis should refrain from attending school or work until they are well. They should not prepare food while having symptoms.

Precautions You Can Take

You can reduce your chance of contracting gastric flu by following these preventive steps:

- Wash your hands frequently, especially after toilet visits and before eating or preparing food.
- Wash fruits and vegetables thoroughly before consumption.
- Clean and disinfect contaminated surfaces thoroughly immediately after an episode of illness by using the proportion of one part bleach to nine parts water.
- Immediately remove and wash clothing or linens that may be contaminated with virus after an episode of illness (use hot water and soap).

Flush or discard any vomitus and/or stool in the toilet and make sure that the surrounding area is kept clean.