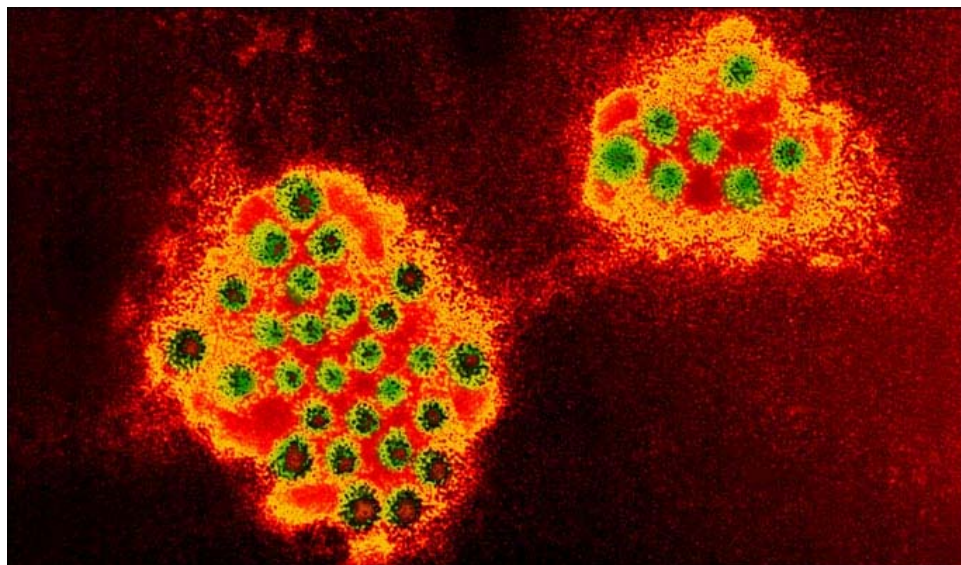


Norovirus: Over 200 Sick With Mysterious Disease Following Cheerleading Competition



Health officials confirmed Friday that a fast-acting gut bug known as norovirus is responsible for an outbreak of illness that sickened more than 200 people gathered for a cheerleading championship in Washington state last weekend.

A Washington state Health Department spokesman says the latest count stands at 229 reports of illness among people who attended the event, but could continue to climb as the total number of spectators at the competitions was close to 5,000.

“That number is likely to go up, because there were something on the order of 3,000 people in attendance, plus 1,000 plus who were actual participants,” said Washington State Health Department spokesman Donn Moyer.

Following an investigation, health experts found the norovirus outbreak was likely precipitated by people who were ill in public, said Suzanne Pate, spokeswoman for the Snohomish Health District.

“Somebody arrived at the event sick,” said Pate, noting that janitorial crews were called to clean up vomit in a restroom and on an adjacent walkway. Those areas were likely exposure sites for the cheer and dance teams, she said.

Norovirus, sometimes called cruise ship disease, is part of highly contagious group of viruses that cause acute gastroenteritis (the stomach flu) in humans. It circulates frequently, sickening an estimated 20 million people nationally each year.

People with norovirus are contagious from the moment they begin feeling ill to at least three days and as much as two weeks after recovery, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.