



NEWS

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Ursinus College

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UPDATE: MCHD Investigation of Stomach Illness at Ursinus College

Norristown, PA (February 11, 2016) – Ursinus College continues to take proactive measures in conjunction with Montgomery County Health Department (MCHD) officials to investigate and address an outbreak of gastrointestinal illness on campus. The college has voluntarily shut down its dining halls to allow MCHD officials to continue gathering information regarding the illness cluster and to allow for a complete cleaning and sanitization. Out of an abundance of caution, all classes will be canceled for the remainder of Thursday and for Friday. Community restaurants and local businesses are partnering with the College in a tremendous rally of support.

Tuesday evening a number of students at Ursinus College became ill. Symptoms included diarrhea, vomiting, and abdominal pain, and a number of students went to the hospital or to urgent care centers for treatment. The Montgomery County Health Department has asked local health care providers evaluating students to conduct testing immediately.

As of Thursday afternoon, Ursinus College was aware of 153 ill students, staff, and faculty, 30 of whom sought treatment at local hospitals and an urgent care center. An earlier report of a higher number of people sickened included some who were double counted because they first reported to the College Wellness Center before being treated at local hospitals and an urgent care center.

“The increase in the number of people experiencing symptoms between last night and today is not surprising, given the incubation period typical for gastrointestinal illnesses,” said Dr. Valerie Arkoosh, Interim Medical Director of the Montgomery County Health Department. “Students or staff who have experienced symptoms may call the Health Department at 610-278-5117 to share information to aid in the investigation,” said Arkoosh.

Arkoosh also encouraged any students or staff currently experiencing symptoms including diarrhea, vomiting, and abdominal pain to be particularly careful about dehydration and to seek medical care.

It is unknown at this time whether the illness is food-borne or transmitted by person-to-person contact. MCHD is interviewing students and employees and looking at all possible sources of infection and looking for any commonalities.

Routinely, it is recommended to test for both bacteria and viruses when persons present with these symptoms. Testing results could take up to a week.

Ursinus College is working closely with MCHD to determine the cause of the illness. College students or staff who experiences symptoms can contact the Ursinus College Wellness Center (wellness@ursinus.edu) or come in during regular hours from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. UC EMS will be available 24/7 for assistance; contact Campus Safety at 610-409-3333.

“Ursinus’ first priority is the health and well-being of our students,” said President Brock Blomberg. “We will continue to work closely with officials from the Montgomery County Health Department and follow their recommendations. In addition, Ursinus couldn’t be more grateful for the outpouring of support it has received from the surrounding community to help us support our students.”

Blomberg noted the support from restaurants and local businesses has been particularly appreciated by the school’s faculty, staff, and students.

Ursinus partnered with Wawa and Wegman’s to offer students a ‘grab-and-go’ breakfast. Wawa and the Collegeville Italian Bakery were on hand during lunch. This follows an evening in which five area restaurants welcomed Ursinus students for dinner: the Collegeville Italian Bakery, The Pizza Stop, Rocco’s, Franco’s Pizza Family Restaurant, and Marzella’s Pizzeria.

It is common at this time of year for gastrointestinal illnesses (GI), such as Norovirus, more commonly

known as the stomach bug, to be circulating in the community, particularly in institutions like colleges and long-term care facilities where people are living in close quarters.

“The best way to prevent the spread GI illness is to practice good hand-hygiene and to thoroughly clean and disinfect all surfaces in common areas,” said Dr. Arkoosh.