Going for the Gut: Norovirus Strikes the Winter Olympics

By Julianna LeMieux — February 6, 2018

The most recent Olympic Games have had their own infectious disease crises. In the Rio summer games of 2016, Zika virus was a major concern for some athletes. In fact, some athletes and other personnel opted out of going to the Olympics at all, even though the chance of contracting Zika virus was very small.

This year's winter Olympic Games have not even started yet, and there is already an infectious disease crisis happening. The culprit is norovirus and it's creating a stomachache for the Olympic organizers in Seoul.

What is norovirus?

Norovirus, otherwise known as the "stomach bug", has two major qualities. First, it is terrible when you get it, causing almost non-stop vomiting and diarrhea for a short, but significant amount of time (usually one to two days.) Second, it is extremely contagious.

A situation like the one setting up in the Olympic facilities in Pyeongchang, with a lot of people crammed into a small area, is where norovirus does the most damage.

And, damage is exactly what it is causing there. Dozens of security guards suffered sudden vomiting and diarrhea on Sunday. They were taken to the hospital and but all seem to be in stable condition.

Norovirus is transmitted through the fecal/oral route, meaning that people can contract it by consuming contaminated food or water, touching your mouth with a contaminated hand and being in close contact with someone who has a norovirus infection. Noroviruses are especially resistant
to certain conditions and can withstand hot and cold temperatures and common cleaners.

**What can be done to treat Norovirus?**

The answer is nothing, really. Because it is a virus, antibiotics do not help. The only thing that can be done is to ride it out and try to stay hydrated.

To try to stop the spread, the Olympics are doing the only thing that can be done. They have removed over a thousand security guards from duty in the Winter Olympic facilities. In their place, 900 military personnel are temporarily standing in. Their main job will be to perform security searches within the 20 different venues until the security guards are in the clear.

They also are testing the food, water and sleeping areas for the staff at the games.

Really, the move made by the Olympic committee seems to be the best way to prevent rampant spread over the next few days. Since South Korea's 2018 Winter Olympics are set to open on Thursday and only run for two weeks, they had to move fast. Hopefully, their swift action stopped the norovirus in its tracks.

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