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PRESS STATEMENT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Monday, 31st March, 2025

Contact: Permanent Secretary
Kingstown, St. Vincent and the Grenadines

**MINISTRY OF HEALTH WARNS OF GASTROENTERITIS CASES INCLUDING THE NOROVIRUS AND
URGES PUBLIC TO TAKE THE NECESSARY PRECAUTIONARY MEASURES**

The Ministry of Health, Wellness, and the Environment is alerting the public to take the necessary precautionary measures to prevent the spread of gastroenteritis like the norovirus, a highly contagious virus. Symptoms include vomiting, diarrhea, stomach cramps, nausea, fever, and body aches. While norovirus infections are usually mild and short-lived, they can cause severe dehydration, in young children, the elderly, and individuals with weakened immune systems.

Norovirus spreads easily through:

- Direct contact with an infected person vomiting or diarrhea
- Consuming contaminated food or water.
- Touching contaminated surfaces, the touching the eyes, mouth and nose with unwashed eyes.

To this end, the Ministry would like to report that for the period of March 2nd – 22nd 2025 three hundred and fifty-five (355) cases of gastroenteritis were reported, over the threshold of normal. Of the cases reported, eight (8) tested positive for the Norovirus. Testing of the Norovirus requires a stool sample test (RT-PCR) to confirm the presence of the virus by detecting the virus's DNA in a stool. The public is advised to visit their nearest healthcare provider and ask about testing for the virus if they experience three or more watery stool and vomiting within a twenty-four-hour period.

Given the easy transmission of the virus, the Ministry urges all Vincentians to take the following precautionary measures:

1. **Get Tested for Norovirus** – If you experience symptoms, visit your nearest health care center and ask about testing.
2. **Wash Hands Frequently** – Use soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially before eating, preparing food, or after using the bathroom. Note that hand sanitizers are less effective against norovirus.
3. **Practice Proper Food Hygiene** – Ensure food is cooked thoroughly and handled safely to prevent contamination. Wash fruits and vegetables properly before consumption.

4. **Disinfect Surfaces Regularly** – Clean and disinfect commonly touched surfaces, such as doorknobs, counter-tops, and bathroom fixtures, using a bleach-based solution.
5. **Avoid Close Contact if Sick** – If you or a family member experiences symptoms, stay home, avoid preparing food for others, and limit contact to prevent the spread of the virus.
6. **Hydrate and Seek Medical Attention if Necessary** – Drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration, and seek medical help if symptoms become severe or persistent.
7. **Limit Visitation to Hospital and other Patient Settings** – Persons visiting hospital settings also play a crucial role in preventing the spread of viruses and other infections. If you or someone in your household is experiencing vomiting or any other infectious condition, you should not visit friends or relatives in the hospital. Ensure that you have been symptom-free for at least 48–72 hours before visiting.

The Ministry is actively monitoring the situation and working with healthcare facilities and communities to ensure a prompt response and effective treatment. Vincentians are encouraged to remain vigilant and follow these guidelines to protect themselves and their communities.

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