

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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STEGH Managing Outbreak with Visitors' Co-operation

St. Thomas, ON - An outbreak of gastrointestinal illness has been confirmed on the south wing of fifth floor at the St. Thomas Elgin General Hospital (STEGH). The hospital has been working closely with the Elgin St. Thomas Health Unit to manage the situation and precautions are in place on this wing, to minimize the spread of illness. Currently, five patients in hospital have gastrointestinal symptoms related to this outbreak.

At the recommendation of the Health Unit, STEGH is asking that only immediate family members visit patients on the south wing of fifth floor, until the outbreak is over. These visitors are asked not to bring children and to limit their travels throughout the hospital.

While the visiting restrictions are in place only for the south wing of fifth floor, it is essential that all visitors wash their hands thoroughly, or use the liquid hand sanitizer before and after visiting. Careful hand washing is critical to manage the spread of infection. All visitors are also reminded to delay their visit for 48 hours if they are sick or have other family members with any illness. Illness can often spread before symptoms are obvious, so if it is in your household, you may be transmitting it to others.

Several Ontario communities are reporting outbreaks of gastrointestinal illness which include diarrhea, nausea, vomiting and cramps. "Gastrointestinal illness has been prevalent in the community all winter," states MaryLynn Maerten, Manager, Health Protection Department at the Elgin St. Thomas Health Unit. "There have been several gastrointestinal outbreaks reported in other area facilities."

The Hospital's main concern is for the safety and well being of patients, visitors, staff and volunteers, and is taking every precaution to ensure this. "We are confident we are doing everything possible to contain this outbreak and to protect our patients and staff," states Anna Hunt, Infection Control Specialist at the St. Thomas Elgin General Hospital. "Our staff are well trained to identify trends immediately and step up precautions, which are often put in place even before a diagnosis is made, based on the patients' symptoms. We have found the sooner precautions are in place, the better control we have over reducing the potential for spread to other areas of the Hospital."

Both the Health Unit and STEGH will closely monitor the situation for any need to revise these temporary precautions.

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