

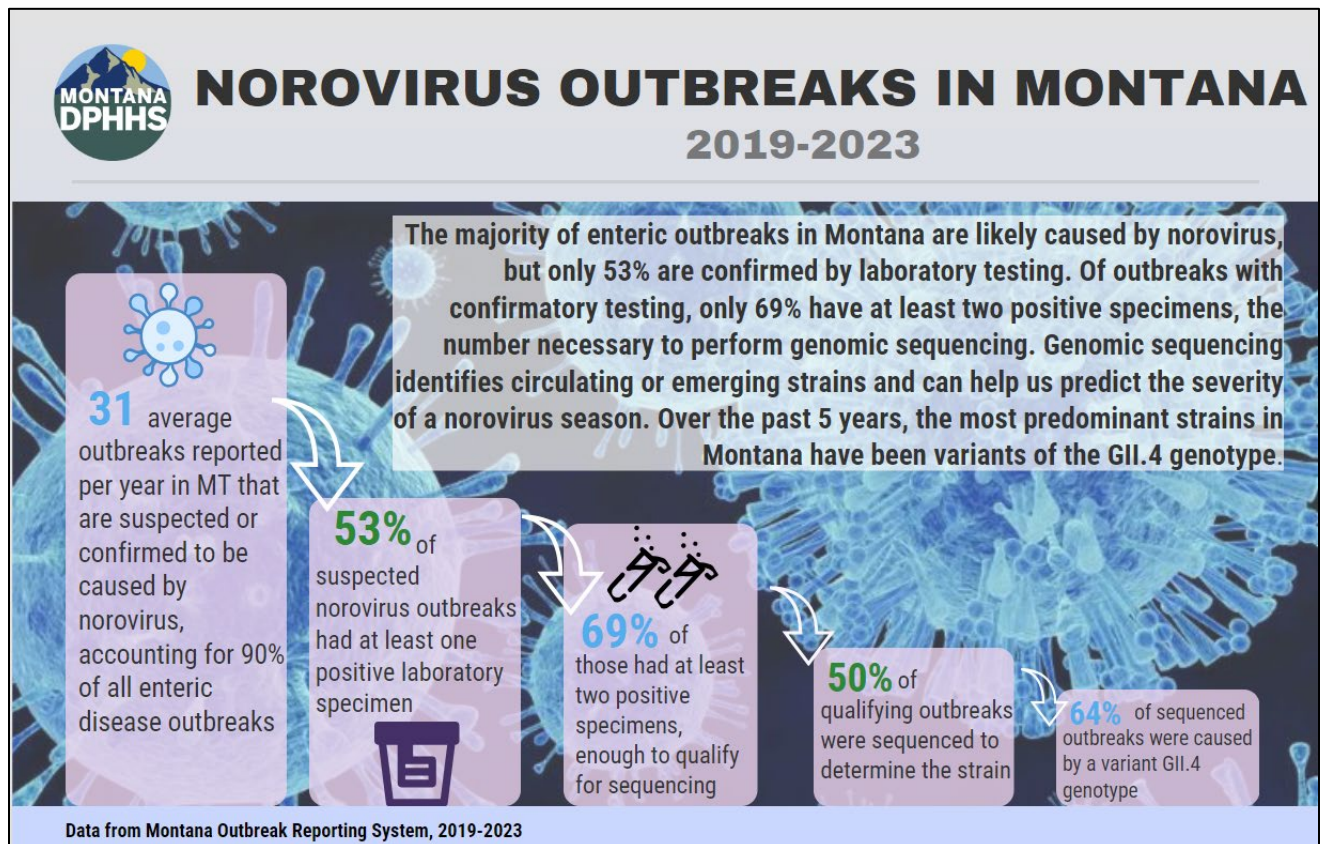


September 2024

To all Laboratorians,

Norovirus season is upon us and the Montana Department of Health and Human Services (DPHHS) needs your help! To improve our outbreak surveillance for norovirus, we are asking you to **submit your positive norovirus specimens** to the Montana Public Health Laboratory (MTPHL). Outbreaks occurring in congregate settings such as schools, nursing homes, hospitals, and childcare settings are reportable and provide a glimpse of the infectious diseases circulating in Montana.

Confirming the causative agent for an outbreak is an important task and is necessary to determine the burden of disease, respond appropriately to the disease threat, and accurately understand the pathogenicity of the organism. We are very interested in receiving specimens from these outbreaks to perform further surveillance testing, but unfortunately do not always get specimens submitted.



The MTPHL and the Communicable Disease Epidemiology program (CDEpi) partner with the Idaho Bureau of Laboratories to participate in CaliciNet, which is a national database that collects information on norovirus strains associated with gastroenteritis outbreaks.¹ Over the last five years in Montana, from 2019-2023, the majority of norovirus outbreaks were caused by a GII.4 variant. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the most common strain of norovirus circulating across the United States between September 2023 and August 2024 was GII.17[P17].² CDC data show that in years when a new strain of the virus is introduced, there can be 50% more norovirus illness.³ GII.17[P17] began circulating in Montana toward the end of 2023, and there is concern that Montana will see an increase in norovirus activity in the upcoming months if this strain continues to spread.

To help in our surveillance efforts, we are asking you to submit positive norovirus specimens to the MTPHL. These specimens will be placed in storage and if an outbreak is identified, they will be further tested and sequenced to determine the outbreak strain.

- If feasible, please send all positive norovirus specimens to the Montana Public Health Laboratory for storage and possible testing in the event of a confirmed outbreak (Sept 2024 – April 2025 only).
 - A minimum of one (1) mL of raw stool is required for testing. Stool should be refrigerated or frozen and shipped to MTPHL in cold condition. (Please consider this if you are sending transport swabs to a reference laboratory for PCR testing.)
 - Laboratories on the courier route should use the courier system to send specimens.
- Please mark slips as: “positive for norovirus - hold for outbreak surveillance”.
- Further norovirus testing and sequencing will be performed at **no cost** on identified outbreak specimens and as requested by CDEpi.
- If your laboratory does not test for norovirus, the MTPHL does provide routine diagnostic testing for norovirus in raw stool specimens.

Thank you in advance for helping improve our understanding of norovirus in Montana.

Please contact the MTPHL (1-800-821-7284) or CDEpi (406-444-0273) with any questions.

¹ https://www.cdc.gov/norovirus/php/reporting/calicinet.html?CDC_AAref_Val=

² <https://www.cdc.gov/norovirus/php/reporting/calicinet-data.html>

³ <https://www.cdc.gov/norovirus/data-research/index.html>