



News Statement

15 August 2023

UKHSA North East update on illness following World Triathlon Championship Series Sunderland

UKHSA's North East Health Protection team has today announced its preliminary findings on causes of illness in participants who took part in the UK leg of the World Triathlon Championship Series in Sunderland.

As of today (Tuesday 15 August), 88 people who took part in the British Triathlon hosted event have contacted the North East Health Protection Team to report experiencing diarrhoea and/or vomiting symptoms after the event.

31 samples have been received and laboratory tested for a range of viral and bacterial pathogens that can cause symptoms of diarrhoea and vomiting.

Laboratory results received so far indicate that 60% (19/31) of those who sent faecal samples had evidence of Norovirus infection. The remaining samples either tested negative or were positive for other infections including sapovirus, astrovirus and rotavirus.

To date there have been no lab confirmed reports of micro-organisms, such as E coli O157/STEC (Shiga toxin-producing Escherichia coli), which may cause severe gastrointestinal illness. Although no STEC has been detected, laboratory results do show other E. coli present in four (4) samples.

People can naturally carry organisms in their gut, and so it would not be possible to say whether they had a positive result due to their participation in the event or that they were already carrying these organisms. It is not uncommon to detect more than one infection following testing of faecal samples, but the predominance of Norovirus makes it the most likely explanation of illness in participants.

An in-depth survey of all participants who contacted the UKHSA North East Health Protection Team remains underway and anyone who has not yet contacted British Triathlon to report symptoms after the event is still encouraged to do so.

Individuals are being updated on their lab results as and when they are available, and a fuller outbreak report will be made available once all investigations have been undertaken.

Norovirus is very easily transmitted through contact with people with the infection and any food, water, surfaces or objects that have been contaminated with the virus. Although investigations continue, the exact source of the infections may not be possible to determine.

Dr Kirsty Foster, Consultant in Health Protection said: “We thank everyone who took the time to contact British Triathlon to undertake sampling and respond to our epidemiological investigations and I hope that today’s preliminary findings will offer some reassurance.

“Norovirus is a very unpleasant stomach bug but tends to pass after a few days with most people usually making a complete recovery without any specific treatment. Rest and drinking lots of fluids are important to avoid dehydration. Norovirus can easily spread from person to person, particularly in large groups.

“The risk to the wider public remains very low. However it is always important that we all follow advice on how to manage symptoms of diarrhoea and vomiting and good hygiene is important to prevent others from becoming infected. This includes thorough handwashing, especially after toilet visits and before eating. Any contaminated surfaces should be thoroughly disinfected with a bleach-based cleaner after an episode of illness.

Dr Foster added: “Many people enjoy open swimming and the considerable social and wellbeing benefits it brings. However it is important to remember that anyone can become unwell from swimming in open water as there will always be micro-organisms present. There are a number of ways people can reduce their risk of illness though and these are detailed in the Swim Healthy guidelines.”

Information and health advice on swimming in open water is available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/swim-healthy-leaflet/swim-healthy>.

Information on Norovirus is available here: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/norovirus/>

Ends

Note to editors

UKHSA advice for patients who may have symptoms of diarrhoea and vomiting:

- Diarrhoea and vomiting is usually a self-limiting illness and you will recover naturally without treatment. It is, however, important to take plenty of drinks to replace lost fluids.
- Visit the NHS website <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/diarrhoea-and-vomiting> for advice on how to manage your symptoms at home or help to access the most appropriate health service.

- If symptoms persist, ask for a telephone consultation with your family doctor. Try to avoid visiting your GP surgery or local A&E Unit as you may pass the infection on to others.
- Wash hands thoroughly and regularly at all times, but particularly after using the toilet and before eating.
- Do not visit friends or relatives in residential care homes until you have fully recovered and have been free of symptoms for at least 48 hours as there is a real risk that you would introduce the infection into these communities putting vulnerable people at risk.
- Stay away from work or school until you have fully recovered and been free of symptoms for 48 hours.
- Do not handle or prepare food for other people until you have been free of symptoms for at least 48 hours.