Johnston County NC
Environmental Health

Guidelines for Handling Vomit and Diarrhea Cleanup

The North Carolina Food Code requires commercial food establishments to maintain written procedures for cleaning up vomit and diarrheal events. Vomit can aerosolize and spread viruses up to 30 feet from the epicenter, making strict sanitation critical to protect employees and patrons. Based on Johnston County Environmental Health and NC guidelines, here is a standard cleanup procedure.

Preparation and Containment

First, promptly remove the ill individual and keep all customers and unprotected employees out of the area. You must block off a 25 to 30-foot radius from the epicenter of the event. Before beginning cleanup, the designated employee must put on personal protective equipment (PPE), which should at a minimum include single-use gloves and a disposable face mask.

Cleaning Hard Surfaces

For tile, wood, or other solid floors and counters, follow a strict four-step process:

- **Cover:** Pour an absorbent powder (like cat litter, baking soda, or a commercial solidifier) over the fluids to soak them up.
- **Remove:** Use a disposable scoop or scraper to pick up the hardened material and place it carefully into a plastic garbage bag.
- **Wash:** Wash all surfaces within the containment zone with soapy water, then rinse with clean water.
- **Disinfect:** Saturate the washed area with a commercial disinfectant effective against Norovirus or a bleach solution (one cup of regular 5.25% bleach per gallon of water) and allow a 10-minute contact time.

Cleaning Soft Surfaces

For carpets or upholstered furniture, cover and remove the liquid using the same method as hard surfaces, but absolutely never use a vacuum. Wash the area with soapy water, then steam clean the surface for 5 minutes at a temperature of 170°F to properly disinfect the fabric.

Post-Cleanup and Disposal

Throw away all exposed food, single-use condiments, or packaging within the 30-foot containment zone. While still in the contained area, the employee must remove their PPE, place it into the plastic trash bag, seal the bag tightly, and throw it in an exterior dumpster. Finally, employees must thoroughly wash their hands (double-washing for food handlers) and be monitored for illness symptoms for 48 hours.

How to Assemble a Commercial Bodily Fluid Cleanup Kit

A commercial bodily fluid cleanup kit (often referred to as a "Norovirus kit" in the food service industry) should be pre-assembled, clearly labeled, and easily accessible to employees so they can respond quickly to an incident.

Here is what you need to include in your commercial cleanup kit:

1. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

The safety of the employee performing the cleanup is the first priority. All PPE should be single-use and disposable.

- **Disposable gloves:** Include several pairs of nitrile or latex gloves (avoid vinyl, as they are less protective).
- **Face masks:** Surgical or N95 masks to protect against aerosolized particles.
- **Disposable aprons or gowns:** To protect the employee's clothing from splashes.
- **Shoe covers and hairnets:** Optional but recommended to prevent tracking the virus throughout the facility.

2. Cleanup and Removal Tools

These items are used to physically contain and remove the biological matter before sanitizing.

- **Absorbent material:** A commercial liquid solidifier, kitty litter, or baking soda to pour over the spill and clump the liquid.
- **Disposable scoop and scraper:** Heavy-duty cardboard or plastic scrapers designed to pick up the solidified matter without the employee having to touch it.
- **Paper towels:** Industrial, highly absorbent paper towels for wiping up residue.

3. Disinfectants

Standard cleaners will not kill pathogens like Norovirus. You must include specific, potent chemicals.

- **EPA-registered disinfectant:** A commercial chemical explicitly labeled as effective against Norovirus.
- **Bleach (alternative):** If you do not use a commercial chemical, keep a fresh, unopened bottle of unscented regular bleach (5.25% concentration) to mix a solution of 1 cup of bleach per gallon of water.

4. Disposal Supplies

Contaminated materials must be isolated immediately.

- **Heavy-duty garbage bags:** Provide at least two thick, brightly colored or clearly labeled plastic bags for double-bagging the waste and the used PPE.
- **Zip ties or twist ties:** To ensure the bags are securely sealed before being taken to the outside dumpster.

I recommend storing these items in a sealed plastic bin or bucket clearly marked "Bodily Fluid Cleanup Kit" and keeping it near your standard janitorial supplies.

Required Documentation and Training Records

Under the North Carolina Food Code and Johnston County Environmental Health guidelines, having a written procedure is only the first step. You are also required to implement it through documented employee training and post-incident monitoring. During a health inspection, the inspector will likely ask to see your written plan and your training log.

Here is what is required regarding documentation and training for vomit and diarrheal events:

When to Train Employees

You must identify in advance which employees are authorized and responsible for cleaning up bodily fluids. These specific workers must be trained on how to properly use the personal protective equipment (PPE), the step-by-step cleaning and disinfecting process, and the safe disposal of the waste.

Training must be conducted and documented at the following times:

- When the clean-up procedures are first written and implemented.

- During the onboarding process when new workers are hired.
- Periodically as a refresher or review.
- Whenever there is a change or update to your written clean-up procedures.

What to Document

While the health department provides templates, your establishment must maintain its own records.

- **The Written Plan:** You must keep a physical copy of your specific clean-up procedure on-site and readily accessible.
- **The Training Log:** Keep a signed and dated record of which employees have been trained on the procedure and when the training occurred.
- **Incident Reports:** While not always strictly mandated, it is highly recommended to document any actual incidents, including the date, time, the employee who performed the cleanup, and the specific location in the facility.

Post-Incident Monitoring

Your responsibility does not end once the cleanup is finished and the trash is taken out.

- **48-Hour Watch:** Management must monitor the employees who performed the cleanup for any symptoms of illness for at least 48 hours after the incident.
- **Exclusion:** If a clean-up employee begins showing symptoms of vomiting or diarrhea, they must be immediately excluded from work.
- **Return to Work:** Sick employees cannot return to the facility until they have been completely symptom-free for more than 24 hours, or until they provide written medical documentation from a health practitioner stating their symptoms are from a non-infectious condition.

Official Johnston County Environmental Health Templates for Starting a Written Plan

To help you get your written procedures properly documented, the easiest route is to use the exact templates provided by state and county health authorities. You can print these out, fill in your establishment's specific details, and keep them on-site to satisfy the North Carolina Food Code requirements.

Here are the best official resources to use as your starting point:

1. The Official NC Environmental Health Template

The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS) provides a comprehensive, pre-written template that is widely accepted by all county health departments, including Johnston County. This is the gold standard for your baseline plan.

- **Document:** NCDHHS Vomit and Diarrhea Clean-up Plan (PDF)
- **How to use it:** Print this document and use it as your main policy. It contains the exact step-by-step procedures for hard surfaces, soft surfaces, and post-cleanup monitoring.

2. Johnston County Specific Applications

Johnston County Environmental Health actually embeds these required cleanup procedures directly into their permit applications (such as those for Mobile Food Units or Transitional Permits). If you are currently applying for a permit or want to see exactly what the county distributes, you can view their packets.

- **Document:** Johnston County Transitional Permit Application (PDF)
- **How to use it:** Scroll down to the "Vomit & Diarrhea Clean-up Plan" section within the packet. It mirrors the state requirements and is a great reference to ensure your independent plan aligns with what local inspectors are handing out.

Tips for Customization

While these templates are excellent starting points, a health inspector will want to see that the plan is customized to your specific building. When you print these out, I highly recommend attaching a cover sheet that includes:

- The physical location of your cleanup kit (e.g., "Stored in the locked janitorial closet next to the mop sink").
- The specific titles of the employees authorized to perform the cleanup (e.g., "Shift Manager and Assistant Manager").
- A blank training log grid where employees can sign and date when they complete their training.

How to Handle the 48-hour Employee Monitoring and the Rules for Excluding Sick Employees from Work

In North Carolina, food service establishments are required to strictly adhere to the NC Food Code regarding employee health. Because vomiting and diarrhea are primary symptoms of highly contagious foodborne illnesses like Norovirus, the rules for excluding sick employees and monitoring them are strict.

Here are the specific rules regarding employee exclusion and the 48-hour monitoring period:

1. Exclusion of Sick Employees

If any employee reports experiencing symptoms of vomiting or diarrhea, the Person in Charge (PIC) is required by law to **exclude** that employee from the food establishment.

- **What Exclusion Means:** Exclusion means the employee is not allowed to come to work or be inside the food service facility in any capacity. They cannot be reassigned to non-food tasks; they must go home.

2. When They Can Return to Work (The 24-Hour Rule)

An employee who was excluded for having vomiting or diarrhea cannot return to work until one of two conditions is met:

- **Symptom-Free:** More than **24 hours** must have passed since their very last episode of vomiting or diarrhea.
- **Medical Clearance:** Alternatively, they can return if they provide written medical documentation from a physician stating that the vomiting or diarrhea is the result of a non-infectious condition (such as a medication side effect or a chronic digestive issue).

Note: If an employee is officially diagnosed by a doctor with Norovirus, the exclusion period is longer. State guidelines typically require a confirmed Norovirus patient to be excluded from work for 3 days or remain out until 48 hours after their symptoms have completely resolved.

3. The 48-Hour Post-Incident Monitoring

This specific rule applies to the employee who volunteered or was assigned to clean up the bodily fluids during a vomit or diarrheal event.

- Even if the employee wore full Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) during the cleanup, management must actively monitor that worker for symptoms of illness for at least **48 hours** after the incident occurred.

- If the clean-up employee begins to show symptoms of vomiting or diarrhea during that 48-hour window, they must immediately be excluded from work and are subject to the same 24-hour symptom-free return policy mentioned above.

To comply with the Johnston County Environmental Health department during an inspection, it is crucial that all of these rules are documented in your signed Employee Health Policy Agreements.