

South Central Health District 5-1 • 2121-B Bellevue Road • Dublin, Georgia 31021

Phone: 478-275-6545 • Fax: 478-275-6575

Lawton C. Davis, M.D., District Health Director

*Serving: Bleckley, Dodge, Johnson, Laurens, Montgomery, Pulaski, Telfair, Treutlen, Wheeler, & Wilcox counties*

September 15, 2017

Dear Parents,

As you are aware, several school facilities in Laurens County were used as shelters for persons evacuating from coastal Georgia and Florida during Hurricane Irma. Two of those shelter sites were at the East Laurens school complex, East Laurens High School Gymnasium (ELHS) and East Laurens Middle School Gymnasium (ELMS). During the course of the sheltering operation at ELMS several of the displaced people developed a gastro – intestinal (G I) illness causing diarrhea and occasionally vomiting. The illness typically lasted only 24 - 36 hours, similar to the G I symptoms we all experience from time to time. The illness was NOT associated with the food service, as the same food was fed to people in both East Laurens shelters, and the outbreak was confined to ELMS. Had it been caused by the food it would have affected *both* shelters. We believe that one or more of the evacuees, possibly a family, brought the virus with them and because of the close confines and fragile health conditions of many of the evacuees, it spread to some of the others in the shelter.

Due to concerns expressed by parents through telephone calls and social media, we wanted to send out a joint letter from the Laurens County Board of Education and the Department of Public Health to inform parents of all steps that have been taken to address this situation. Those who were sick were all housed within the East Laurens Middle School gym. None of the sick were housed within East Laurens High School. However, to be cautious, the American Red Cross contracted with a professional cleaning company to clean and disinfect all parts of both buildings that were used for sheltering operations. Also, the school system, followed up with additional cleaning on their own. As an added precaution, the East Laurens Middle School gym will not be used by students for the remainder of this week.

The Department of Public Health would like to thank the Laurens County School Board for its efforts to assist displaced residents during this difficult time and to assure the public that the school system has taken all reasonable steps to insure the safety of all students within the school system.

Anyone having additional questions can contact the South Central Health District office at 478-275-6545.

Sincerely,



Lawton Davis, MD  
District Health Director



Jerry Hatcher  
Laurens County School Superintendent

