

Diarrhoea and Vomiting (Norovirus)

Information for patients and visitors

Please follow this guidance from the
Infection Prevention and Control Team



What is Norovirus?

Norovirus comes from a family of highly infectious viruses that are the most common cause of vomiting and/or diarrhoea in humans. Sometimes this condition is referred to as 'winter vomiting bug' due to its seasonality and typical symptoms.

Where does Norovirus come from?

Norovirus often comes in outbreaks because it is easily spread from one person to another and the virus is able to survive in the environment for many days. Outbreaks commonly occur in semi-closed environments, such as hospitals, nursing homes, schools and on cruise ships where people are in close contact with one another for long periods.

How does Norovirus spread?

Infection is most commonly spread by:

- Person-to-person contact by inhalation of particles shed by vomiting.
- Environmental contamination.
- Contaminated food.
- Unwashed hands that contaminate food.
- Soiled clothing and surfaces (for example toilets, commodes or bed tables).

How can the spread of Norovirus be prevented?

Good hygiene is important in preventing others from becoming infected - this includes thorough hand washing with soap and water after using the toilet. Food preparation for others should also be avoided until 48 hours after the symptoms have subsided.

What are the symptoms?

The most common symptoms are nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea. Symptoms often start with the sudden onset of nausea followed by projectile vomiting and watery diarrhoea.

However, not all of those infected will experience all of the symptoms. Some people may also have a raised temperature, headaches and aching limbs.

Symptoms usually begin between 1 to 3 days after exposure to the virus. The illness is self-limiting and the symptoms can last for 12 to 60 hours. Most people make a full recovery within 1-2 days, however some people (usually the very young or elderly) may become very dehydrated and require medical attention.

How is Norovirus treated?

There is no specific treatment for Norovirus apart from letting the illness run its course. It is important to drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration.

Where does Norovirus come from?

Norovirus occurs worldwide and is often associated with large outbreaks in the community and establishments including hotels, ships, nursing homes and hospitals. Norovirus accounts for more than half of all reported gastroenteritis outbreaks every year.

Who is at risk of getting Norovirus?

There is no one specific group who are at risk of contracting Norovirus, it affects people of all ages. The very young and elderly should take extra care if infected as dehydration is more common in these age groups.

When I am in hospital, how can I help?

- Ask your friends and family not to visit if they are feeling unwell themselves. Relatives who are unwell themselves should not visit until at least 72 hours after the resolution of their symptoms.
- Your visitors will be advised to wear gloves and aprons to prevent personal contamination with germs which may be present in the environment.
- Visits by children of school age should be discouraged for the duration of an outbreak.
- Only bring in the essential belongings you need. The less cluttered your bed space is the more easily our domestic staff can clean.
- Ask your relatives not to bring food into hospital unless necessary and then it should be in a sealed container.
- Do not share your belongings with other patients.
- Do not sit on other patients' beds or in their chairs.
- Wash your hands with soap and water before handling food.
- Wash your hands with soap and water after going to the toilet or changing nappies.

Do not serve food to other people when you have symptoms of vomiting or diarrhoea, and for at least 48 hours after your symptoms cease.

If you have any questions please speak to a nurse in charge on the ward.