



Norovirus

What is Norovirus.

Noroviruses are part of a group of viruses that are the most common cause of gastroenteritis (stomach bugs) in the UK. Noroviruses are sometimes called 'winter vomiting disease' because people tend to get them during the winter months. However, they can occur at any time of the year.

What symptoms might I have?

The symptoms of a Norovirus usually start between 24-48 hours after the initial infection, although they can start after as little as 12 hours. The first symptom is usually a sudden onset of feeling sick, which is followed by violent vomiting and watery diarrhoea. Vomiting is the most common symptom but you may have diarrhoea without vomiting or vomiting without diarrhoea.

Some people may also have:

- a mild fever,
- headaches,
- stomach cramps, or aching limbs
- general tiredness and feeling 'unwell'

These symptoms usually last for 24 to 72 hours. Remember people often look and feel very ill when they have Norovirus but recover very quickly if they take plenty of fluids. There are many different types of Norovirus, and it is possible for infection to occur several times. This is because after getting the illness, immunity to the virus only lasts for fourteen weeks.

Who is at risk?

People of all ages are at risk of developing Norovirus if they have been in contact with the virus but can cause outbreaks when people are confined in close proximity to each other in settings such as schools, hospitals, cruise ships, military bases and similar settings.

How is it treated?

There is no specific treatment for a Norovirus, apart from letting the condition run its course. If you, or your child, have Norovirus, starving (not eating) will not speed up the recovery process any more than eating a light diet. You should start by eating foods that are easy to digest, such as soup, rice, pasta, and bread. Babies should be given their normal feed. Drinking plenty of water is important to replace the fluids that are lost through diarrhoea and vomiting, and prevent becoming dry. This is very important for young children and the elderly, who are particularly prone to dehydration.

How is it spread?

Norovirus spreads very easily from person to person, and the virus can survive for several days in a contaminated area. Only a few virus particles are needed to cause infection. Norovirus can be spread through contact with:

- an infected person, through contact with hands, surfaces, or objects that are contaminated with the virus
- by eating/drinking contaminated food or water
- not washing your hands after using the toilet
- being exposed to the virus or the vomit of someone who has the virus
- touching surfaces (such as toilet handle flushes, furniture) that have the virus on them.

How can spread be prevented?

Although it is not always possible to prevent getting Norovirus, good hygiene can help to limit the spread of the infection. Here are some practical steps that you can follow to help stop Norovirus spreading:

- Wash your hands frequently and thoroughly, using soap and water, particularly after using



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the toilet, and before preparing food.

- Do not use alcohol hand rubs as they are ineffective against this virus.
- Anyone with the virus should not prepare food.
- Avoid eating raw, unwashed produce
- Disinfect any surfaces or objects that could be contaminated with Norovirus. It is best to use a bleach-based household cleaner. Always follow the instructions on the cleaning product.
- Flush away any infected poo or vomit in the toilet. You should also keep the surrounding toilet area clean and hygienic with a bleach based household cleaner.
- Wash any clothing, or linens, which could have become contaminated with Norovirus separately on the hottest wash.

In hospitals

You will be moved to a single room with their own toilet to prevent the virus spreading on the ward and for your own privacy, until you are free from your symptoms for 48 hours. We will ask the for the door of your single room to be kept closed. The most important method of preventing spread is hand hygiene. It is vital that you wash your hands after you have been to the toilet and before eating. Anyone who comes into contact with you or your environment must wash their hands. Staff will wear gloves and aprons when caring for you. Wards or bays with an outbreak of the infection may be closed to prevent the infection being passed to new admissions. We increase the cleaning on the wards, concentrating on often touched surfaces e.g. door handles and ensure any diarrhoea and vomit is cleared up straight away to reduce the amount of virus in the environment. Visiting is carefully managed to

reduce the likelihood of visitors picking up the virus. Any visitors or relatives, who have been unwell with diarrhoea and/or sickness or in contact with someone who has must not enter the hospital until at least 48 hours after the last symptom.

Can I still go home?

You will not have to stay in hospital any longer than necessary, you will be allowed home when medically fit. You should ensure you carry on taking frequent fluids but if your symptoms get worse you must seek medical help. If you are going to a nursing or residential home, you may be allowed to go once symptom free for 2 days.

What will happen when I home?

Not all precautions taken in hospital are necessary at home. However, it is advisable for everyone to wash their hands before handling food, before eating and after using the toilet and handling soiled linen/clothing. Any soiled items of clothing should be laundered separately at as high a temperature as possible.

Further information:

If you have further questions, please ask your nurse to contact the Infection Prevention and Control Team: Telephone No: 0121 685 4354