



# Norovirus

## What is Norovirus?

Norovirus is one of the most common causes of gastroenteritis (stomach bugs) in the UK. Norovirus is often called 'winter vomiting disease' because people tend to get it during the winter months. However, it can occur at any time of the year.

## What symptoms might I have?

The symptoms of norovirus usually start between 24-48 hours after the initial infection, although they can start after as little as 12 hours after exposure. 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. People often look and feel very ill when they have norovirus but usually recover very quickly especially if they take plenty of fluids.

## Who is at risk?

People of all ages are at risk of developing norovirus if they have been in contact with the virus. It 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 norovirus, apart from letting the condition run its course. If you 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. Drinking plenty of water is important to replace the fluids that are lost through diarrhoea and vomiting and prevent becoming dehydrated. This is very important for 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 flush handles, keyboards, door handles 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 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



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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 stools 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 hospital

You will be moved to a single room with your own toilet to prevent the virus spreading on the ward and for your own privacy, until you are free from your symptoms for at least 48 hours. We will ask the for the door of your single room to be kept closed. The most important method of preventing the 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 frequently 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 or spreading 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 continue 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 be transferred once symptom free for 2 days.

### What will happen when I get 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 a high a temperature as possible.

### Further information

If you have further questions, please discuss with a member of the ward team. You can also ask to speak with a member of the Infection Prevention and Control Team.