

What is norovirus?

Norovirus (was also known as 'small round structured virus' or 'Norwalk-like virus') is a frequent cause of vomiting and diarrhoea in the wider community. It can often cause outbreaks of infection in hospitals, nurseries, schools, care homes and even on cruise ships.

An infection caused by norovirus is often called 'winter vomiting bug'. However, vomiting and diarrhoea caused by norovirus can occur in all seasons and is common in both healthcare settings and in the community.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of infection generally last for approximately 24–48 hours and may include:

- sudden onset of forceful vomiting;
- diarrhoea/loose bowel motions;
- raised temperature/feeling flushed;
- general tiredness and feeling 'unwell'.

Vomiting is the most common symptom experienced but you may also have diarrhoea without vomiting or vomiting without diarrhoea.

There are generally no long-term effects of norovirus and people who develop an infection caused by this virus usually recover after a few days of feeling tired and 'washed out'.

If you have been in contact with norovirus you can expect to have symptoms in about 48 hours after that exposure.

How can norovirus be treated?

- It is important to keep taking fluids to prevent dehydration.
- Medication to stop you from being sick or having loose bowel motions is not recommended because it may cause your infection to last longer.
- Antibiotics are not used to treat viral infections because they only work to fight bacterial infections.

How does norovirus spread?

Humans are the only known carriers of norovirus. It **cannot** be caught from animals, though some food, eg shellfish, may be contaminated. Norovirus is very infectious and is easily caught:

- following close contact with an infected person, when they have vomiting and diarrhoea;
- by eating under-cooked shellfish that was sourced from polluted waters;
- from food contaminated with the virus eg fruit in a bedside locker of a patient who has had norovirus infection;

- by touching contaminated surfaces and not washing your hands with liquid soap and water. The virus could then be ingested (eaten) by the person or passed to another person by assisting them with feeding. See *Hand hygiene* leaflet for more information.

Who is at risk of developing norovirus?

- People of all ages are at risk of developing norovirus.
- More than one case is often reported where groups of people are confined to an area for a prolonged period of time eg schools, nursing homes, nurseries, cruise ships.
- Norovirus infections in a hospital/ care home can be very disruptive, as wards/sections of the home will need to be closed to admissions in order to control the spread of infection.

How can I prevent others from becoming infected?

- Restrict your contact with other people until you have been 48 hours symptom-free.
- Do not visit hospitals, care homes or any other institutions during these 48 hours.
- Wash your hands thoroughly and regularly with liquid soap and water.

The importance of hand hygiene

Hand hygiene is an important way of preventing and controlling the spread of norovirus.

- Wet your hands before applying liquid soap.
- Rub the soap vigorously into all areas of the hands to produce a lather.
- Then rinse hands under running water and dry thoroughly.

DO NOT use hand sanitisers for washing/disinfecting your hands as these do not destroy norovirus.

Please refer to the *Hand hygiene* leaflet for more information.

Cleaning in your home

You can reduce the spread of infection in your home by making sure that:

- toilets and surfaces are thoroughly cleaned using warm water and a suitable cleaning agent;
- surfaces are disinfected using household bleach, according to the manufacturer's instructions (if bleach is not likely to cause damage);
- cloths used for cleaning are disposed of after use.

If you require further advice or information, please contact the hospital's Infection Prevention and Control Team or a member of the ward/care home staff.

Infection prevention and control is everyone's responsibility.

Patients and visitors all have an important role to play in preventing the spread of healthcare associated infections.



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Norovirus

Information leaflet for patients and visitors

