

NOROVIRUS

What are noroviruses?

Norovirus is a virus that causes the “stomach flu,” or vomiting and diarrhea, in people.

What are the symptoms of illness caused by noroviruses?

Common symptoms are nausea, vomiting, diarrhea and stomach cramping. Sometimes people have a low-grade fever, chills, headache, muscle aches and a general sense of tiredness. Norovirus illness usually begins 24 - 48 hours after exposure but can appear as early as 12 hours after exposure. The illness is usually brief, with symptoms lasting only 1 or 2 days. Sometimes people are unable to drink enough liquids to replace what they lose from vomiting and diarrhea, and they can become dehydrated and need to see a doctor. This problem usually occurs only among the very young, the elderly, and persons with weakened immune systems.

How is norovirus spread?

Noroviruses are very contagious and spread easily from person to person. The virus is found in the stool (feces) and vomit of infected people. People can become infected in several ways, including:

- eating food or drinking liquids that are “dirtied” or contaminated by infected food handlers
- touching objects contaminated with norovirus and then touching their mouth before hand washing
- having direct contact with an infected person and then touching their mouth before hand washing
- drinking water contaminated by sewage.

Persons working in day-care centers or nursing homes should pay special attention to children or residents who have norovirus illness. This virus can spread quickly in such places.

How long are people contagious?

People infected with norovirus can spread the germ from the moment they begin feeling ill to at least three days after recovery. Some people may be contagious for as long as two weeks after recovery. Persons sick with norovirus should not prepare food while they have symptoms and for three days after they recover. **Good hand washing is important.** Infected people do not become long-term carriers of norovirus.

Who gets norovirus infection?

Anyone can become infected with these viruses. Because there are many different strains of norovirus, norovirus infection and illness can re-occur throughout a person’s lifetime.

What treatment is available for people with norovirus infection?

Currently, there is no medication or vaccine for norovirus. Norovirus infection cannot be treated with antibiotics. By drinking fluids, such as juice or water, people can reduce their chance of becoming dehydrated.

Sports drinks do not replace the nutrients and minerals lost during this illness.

Do infected people need to be kept home from school, work or daycare?

Since the virus is passed in vomit and stool, children should not go to day care or school while they have diarrhea or vomiting. Once illness ends, children can return to daycare, but hand washing must be strictly monitored. Persons who work in nursing homes, take care of patients, or handle food should stay out of work until at least three days after symptoms end.

Can norovirus infections be prevented?

You can decrease your chance of coming in contact with noroviruses by following these practices:

- Wash hands frequently with water and soap. (Sanitizing gel may be substituted when hands are not visibly soiled.)
- Promptly disinfect contaminated surfaces with household chlorine bleach-based cleaners.
- Wash soiled clothing and linens.
- Avoid food or water from sources that may be contaminated.