

Norovirus

What are noroviruses?

Noroviruses are a group of viruses that cause the “stomach flu” or gastroenteritis in people. The term norovirus is the official name for this group of viruses.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of norovirus begin about 24 to 48 hours after ingestion of the virus, but sometimes as early as 12 hours after exposure. The symptoms of norovirus illness usually include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and some stomach cramping. Children often experience more vomiting than adults. Some people may have a low-grade fever, chills, headache, muscle aches, and a general sense of tiredness. Illness often begins suddenly and the symptoms usually only last about 1 or 2 days.

Is the illness serious?

People may feel very sick and vomit many times a day, but norovirus disease is usually not serious. If people are unable to drink enough liquids to replace the fluids lost because of vomiting and diarrhea they may become dehydrated and need medical attention. Persons most at risk are the very young, the elderly and persons with weakened immune systems or other chronic conditions.

How do people become infected with this virus?

Noroviruses are found in the stool (feces) or vomit of infected people. Infection can occur in several ways:

- o Eating food or drinking liquids that are contaminated with the norovirus.
- o Touching surfaces or objects contaminated with norovirus and then putting hands/objects into the mouth.
- o Having direct contact with another person who is infected.
- o Sharing foods or eating utensils with someone who is ill.

People infected with the norovirus are contagious from the moment they begin feeling ill to at least 3 days after recovery. Some may be contagious for as long as 2 weeks, so it is particularly important for people who are recovering to use good hygiene and effective hand washing.

Will antibiotics help?

Viruses are very different from bacteria and are not affected by treatment with antibiotics. Currently there is no medication or vaccine to prevent infection.

If there is no medication, what can be done to avoid the norovirus?

There are some things you can do to decrease your chance of contact with noroviruses and many other infections that are spread from person to person:

- Wash your hands frequently, especially after using the restroom, helping someone else use the restroom or changing diapers, or helping someone who is ill, and before eating or preparing food.
- Wash fruits and vegetables before eating them.
- Thoroughly clean and disinfect contaminated surfaces immediately after an episode of illness by using a bleach-based household cleaner.
- Immediately remove and wash clothing or linens that may be contaminated with virus after an episode of illness. Use **hot** water and soap.
- Flush or discard any vomitus and/or stool in the toilet immediately and clean the surrounding area.
- Persons who are infected should not prepare food while they have symptoms and for at least 3 days after recovery. Food that may have been contaminated by an ill person should be thrown away.

Remember, the number one prevention method we all have is right at our fingertips—Wash your hands!!