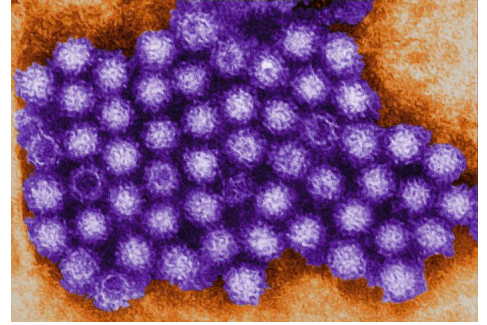


Norovirus Fact Sheet

What is Norovirus?

Norovirus is a very contagious virus. You can get Norovirus from an infected person, contaminated food or water, or by touching contaminated surfaces. The virus causes your stomach or intestines or both to get inflamed (acute gastroenteritis). This leads you to have stomach pain, nausea, and diarrhea and to throw up.



Anyone can be infected with Norovirus and get sick. Also, you can have Norovirus illness many times in your life. Norovirus illness can be serious, especially for young children and older adults.

How common is Norovirus?

Norovirus is the most common cause of acute gastroenteritis in the United States. Each year, it causes 19-21 million illnesses and contributes to 56,000-71,000 hospitalizations and 570-800 deaths. Norovirus is also the most common cause of foodborne-disease outbreaks in the United States.

What are the Symptoms of Norovirus?

Norovirus causes inflammation of the stomach or intestines or both. This is called acute gastroenteritis. The most common symptoms are diarrhea, vomiting, nausea and stomach pain. Other possible symptoms include fever, headache and body aches. Frequent vomiting and diarrhea can lead to dehydration, especially in young children, older adults, and people with other illnesses.

A person usually develops symptoms 12 to 48 hours after being exposed to Norovirus. Most people with Norovirus illness get better within 1 to 3 days.

How is Norovirus spread?

Norovirus is found in stool (feces) even before a person starts feeling sick. The virus can stay in stool for 2 weeks or more after the person has recovered.

People are most contagious when they are sick with Norovirus and during the first few days after they recover from Norovirus.

People can become infected with Norovirus by accidentally getting stool or vomit from infected people in their mouths. This usually happens by eating food or drinking liquids that are contaminated with Norovirus, touching surfaces or objects contaminated with Norovirus then putting their fingers in their mouths, or having contact with someone who is infected with Norovirus (for example, caring for or sharing food or eating utensils with someone with Norovirus illness).

Norovirus can spread quickly in closed places like daycare centers, nursing homes, schools, and cruise ships. Most Norovirus outbreaks happen from November to April in the United States.

How are Norovirus infections diagnosed?

Determining that Norovirus is the cause of the illness depends on laboratory tests that identify Norovirus in the stool or vomitus of an infected person.

How are Norovirus infections treated?

There is no specific medicine to treat people with Norovirus illness. Norovirus infection cannot be treated with antibiotics because it is a viral (not a bacterial) infection.

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If you have Norovirus illness, you should drink plenty of liquids to replace fluid lost from throwing up and diarrhea. This will help prevent dehydration.

Sports drinks and other drinks without caffeine or alcohol can help with mild dehydration. But, these drinks may not replace important nutrients and minerals. Oral rehydration fluids that you can get over the counter are most helpful for mild dehydration.

Dehydration can lead to serious problems. Severe dehydration may require hospitalization for treatment with fluids given through your vein (intravenous or IV fluids). If you think you or someone you are caring for is severely dehydrated, call the doctor.

How can Norovirus infections be prevented?

Wash your hands carefully with soap and water—especially after using the toilet and changing diapers, and always before eating, preparing, or handling food. Noroviruses can be found in your vomit or stool even before you start feeling sick. The virus can stay in your stool for 2 weeks or more after you feel better. So, it is important to continue washing your hands often during this time. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers can be used in addition to hand washing. But, they should not be used as a substitute for washing with soap and water.

Carefully wash fruits and vegetables before preparing and eating them. Cook oysters and other shellfish thoroughly before eating them. Be aware that Noroviruses are relatively resistant. They can survive temperatures as high as 140°F and quick steaming processes that are often used for cooking shellfish. Food that might be contaminated with Norovirus should be thrown out. Keep sick infants and children out of areas where food is being handled and prepared.

You should not prepare food for others or provide healthcare while you are sick and for at least 3 days after symptoms stop. This also applies to sick workers in settings such as schools and daycares where they may expose people to Norovirus. Many local and state health departments require that food workers and preparers with Norovirus illness not work until at least 48 hours after symptoms stop. If you were recently sick, you can be given different duties in the restaurant, such as working at a cash register or hosting.

After throwing up or having diarrhea, immediately clean and disinfect contaminated surfaces. Use a chlorine bleach solution with a concentration of 1000–5000 ppm (5–25 tablespoons of household bleach [5.25%] per gallon of water) or other disinfectant registered as effective against Norovirus by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Immediately remove and wash clothes or linens that may be contaminated with vomit or stool (feces). You should handle soiled items carefully without agitating them, wear rubber or disposable gloves while handling soiled items and wash your hands after, and wash the items with detergent at the maximum available cycle length then machine dry them.

Reference:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Norovirus*.

<http://www.cdc.gov/norovirus/index.html>