

What is norovirus?

Noroviruses are a group of viruses that cause enteric illness. Noroviruses are a common cause of enteric illness outbreaks in North America especially during the winter months.

How does norovirus cause infection and how does it spread?

Noroviruses are found in the stool and vomit of people who are infected. The virus is very contagious because only a small number of viruses is needed to cause illness and the virus is spread easily from person-to-person and from the environment in the following ways:

- Through direct contact with an ill person such as touching them when caring for them or sharing food or eating utensils with them;
- Touching surfaces or items contaminated by the ill person;
- Eating food or drinking water that has been contaminated with norovirus. Berries or leafy greens have been contaminated with norovirus when contaminated water has been used to irrigate crops.

What are the symptoms of norovirus?

Common symptoms of noroviruses include nausea, vomiting (may be of sudden onset and occur often), stomach cramps and diarrhea. Low-grade fever, chills, headache, muscle aches and fatigue may also occur. The symptoms usually begin

suddenly within 24 to 48 hours of being exposed to the virus.

How long do the symptoms of norovirus last?

Most healthy people recover from norovirus in 1 -2 days. Older adults, the very young and people with weakened immune systems may have more severe illness.

How long are people infectious to others?

People are infectious to others as soon as they start having symptoms until at least 72 hours after symptoms have resolved. Frequent hand washing with soap and water is important during this period to prevent spreading infection to others.

Can people who have already had norovirus become infected again?

Yes. Any immunity acquired during a bout of norovirus illness is thought to be short-lived, probably less than 2 years.

How is norovirus diagnosed and how is it treated?

Norovirus can be detected in the stool or vomit from people ill with norovirus by a laboratory test. There is no specific treatment but those suffering from illness should drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration.

How can norovirus infections be prevented?

Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water:

- after using the toilet or changing diapers;
- before preparing, serving or eating food;
- after assisting someone who is ill with gastroenteritis;
- after cleaning up vomit or feces; and
- assist young children to ensure thorough hand washing.

Wash fruits and vegetables with clean water before use.

If ill with gastroenteritis (which may be norovirus) the person should:

- Stay home from work, school or childcare facility;
- Not prepare or serve food for consumption by others;
- Thoroughly clean any vomit and/or feces with soapy water and disinfect with a bleach solution (follow manufacturer's instructions for dilution, application and contact time) immediately after illness;
- Immediately remove and wash clothing or linens that may be contaminated with the virus.