

Norovirus

Information and advice for patients

Infection Control

What is norovirus?

Norovirus is a virus that causes gastroenteritis (stomach bug). Noroviruses are a group of viruses that are the most common cause of stomach bugs. They are also known as 'winter vomiting viruses', 'small round structured viruses' or 'Norwalk-like viruses'.

How do people get norovirus?

Norovirus is passed from one person to another by contact with an infected person; by consuming contaminated food and water or by contact with contaminated surfaces or objects.

Norovirus often causes outbreaks because it is easily spread from one person to another and the virus is able to survive in the environment for many days. Large congregations of people provide an ideal environment for the spread of the disease. Healthcare settings tend to be particularly affected by outbreaks of norovirus.

Who is most at risk?

There is no specific group who are at risk of contracting norovirus – it affects people of all ages. However the very young, the elderly and those with existing medical conditions are at more risk of developing dehydration as a result.

What are the symptoms of norovirus?

The symptoms of norovirus infection begin 12 - 48 hours after becoming infected.

Most people experience a sudden onset of nausea (feeling sick) followed by projectile vomiting and watery diarrhoea. Some people may have a raised temperature, headaches and aching limbs.

Most people make a full recovery in 1 - 2 days, however this may be slightly longer for the very young, people with an underlying illness or the elderly. There are no long-term effects to this illness.

How is norovirus diagnosed?

Norovirus is diagnosed by examining a stool (poo) sample in the laboratory.

What is the treatment for norovirus?

There is no specific treatment for norovirus apart from letting the illness run its course. It is important to drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration.

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How can the spread of norovirus be prevented?

If you are in hospital

If you have norovirus you may unintentionally spread the infection to other patients. Therefore, to reduce the risk of passing the virus to other sick patients you will need to be isolated (nursed in a side room). You may be nursed in a side room with other patients of the same gender who also have norovirus. You can come out of the side room when you have been symptom-free for 48 hours.

To help ensure the virus is not passed on to others:

- contaminated areas will be disinfected
- all staff, patients and visitors will need to wash their hands with soap and water before and after contact with you
- you should wash your hands with soap and water after using the toilet
- there will be increased cleaning in your room and strict hygiene measures will be put in place
- your visitors should not sit on your bed and should wash their hands with soap and water before leaving the ward
- the ward may be closed to new admissions and visitors

If your visitors have had norovirus, they should not visit until they have been symptom-free for 72 hours.

If you are not in hospital

You should not go to work or school until you have been symptom-free for 48 hours and you are eating and drinking normally for you. You should not visit anyone in hospital until you have been symptom-free for 72 hours.

It is also important that you wash your hands with soap and water after using the toilet and before handling food to reduce the risk of passing the virus to others.

Contact details

If you have any questions or concerns please speak to the doctor looking after you, your GP or the hospital or community infection control nurses:

Hospital Infection Control Service

0121 554 3801 (ask for Infection Control Service)

Community Infection Control Nurse

0121 612 2903

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Further Information

NHS Choices

www.nhs.uk/conditions/norovirus

NHS Direct

For health information and reassurance:

www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk

24 hour helpline: 0845 46 47

Health Protection Agency (HPA)

www.hpa.org.uk

For more information about our hospitals and services please see our website:

Sandwell and West Birmingham Hospitals NHS Trust

www.swbh.nhs.uk

Further Infection Control information leaflets can be found on our website, or you can ask a member of staff for a copy. You may find the following leaflet useful:

- Helping us to reduce the risk of cross infection

Sources used for the information in this leaflet

- The Journal of Hospital Infection, 'Management of hospital outbreaks of gastroenteritis due to Noroviruses (SRSV)', May 2000
- Health Protection Agency, Norovirus general clinical information, August 2008
- The International Journal of Infection Control, 'Norovirus', 2006
- Patient UK information for professionals, 'Norovirus', November 2009

If you would like to suggest any amendments or improvements to this leaflet please contact the communications department on 0121 507 5420 or email: swb-tr.swbh-gm-patient-information@nhs.net



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