



Indiana State Department of Health

Epidemiology Resource Center

Quick Facts

About...Norovirus (Viral Gastroenteritis)

What is norovirus?

Norovirus is a highly contagious illness involving inflammation of the stomach and intestines. The infection can produce severe symptoms, but most persons recover quickly and without seeking medical attention. Norovirus is more common in the late fall through the winter, but infections and outbreaks can occur year round.

"Stomach flu" and "food poisoning" are common, but misleading terms for norovirus. Norovirus is **not** the same illness as the flu, a respiratory illness caused by different viruses which produce symptoms such as fever, aches, sneezing, and coughing. The flu does not cause diarrhea or vomiting. Unlike actual food poisoning, norovirus does not come from food. To make someone ill, food must be contaminated by a sick person.

What are the symptoms of norovirus?

- Watery diarrhea
- Vomiting
- Nausea
- Cramps
- Fever
- Headache
- Muscle aches
- Tiredness

Symptoms usually begin 24-48 hours (range of 12-72 hours) after exposure and last 24-48 hours. The illness can last longer in the elderly or in those with weakened immune systems. It can be a serious illness.

How is norovirus spread?

Norovirus is passed in stool and vomit and people become ill by ingesting the stool or vomit from an infected person. The virus is easily spread by contaminated food or beverages, from person to person, and by contact with surfaces or objects with the virus on them. These viruses can remain infectious on surfaces for up to 72 hours, and only a very small amount of virus is needed to cause illness.

Who is at risk for getting norovirus?

Anyone can become ill, but young children, senior adults, pregnant women, and immune suppressed individuals (such as patients on cancer drugs and with organ transplants) are at high risk for illness. You can have norovirus many times in your life.

How do I know if I have norovirus?

A person having diarrhea lasting more than 24 hours should consult a health care provider. The illness is usually diagnosed by symptoms, duration of illness, and medical exam. Your health care provider may order tests to rule out other infections.

How is norovirus treated?

There is no vaccine or medication to cure norovirus. Treatment is based on relieving symptoms. People with diarrhea and vomiting should drink plenty of fluids to avoid dehydration.

How is viral norovirus prevented?

- Wash hands with soap and water after using the restroom; after changing diapers; after helping someone with diarrhea and/or vomiting; after swimming; and before, during, and after food preparation.
- Wash all produce before eating raw or cooking.
- Clean and disinfect contaminated surfaces.
- Wash contaminated laundry thoroughly.
- Persons with diarrhea and/or vomiting should not prepare food or provide health care for others and should limit direct contact with others as much as possible.
- Do not go swimming or use hot tubs if you have diarrhea and for at least two weeks after diarrhea stops.

All information presented is intended for public use. For more information, please refer to: <http://www.cdc.gov/norovirus/index.html>.

Food and Drug Administration, Food Facts for Consumers:
<http://www.fda.gov/Food/ResourcesForYou/Consumers/ucm077286.htm>

This page was last reviewed June 2016.

Norovirus Illness: Key Facts

Norovirus—the stomach bug

Norovirus is a highly contagious virus. Norovirus infection causes gastroenteritis (inflammation of the stomach and intestines). This leads to diarrhea, vomiting, and stomach pain.

Norovirus illness is often called by other names, such as food poisoning and stomach flu. Noroviruses can cause food poisoning, as can other germs and chemicals. Norovirus illness is not related to the flu (influenza). Though they share some of the same symptoms, the flu is a respiratory illness caused by influenza virus.



Anyone can get norovirus illness

- Norovirus is the most common cause of acute gastroenteritis in the U.S.
- Each year, norovirus causes 19 to 21 million cases of acute gastroenteritis in the U.S.
- There are many types of norovirus and you can get it more than once.

Norovirus illness can be serious

- Norovirus illness can make you feel extremely sick with diarrhea and vomiting many times a day.
- Some people may get severely dehydrated, especially young children, the elderly, and people with other illnesses.
- Each year, norovirus causes 56,000 to 71,000 hospitalizations and 570 to 800 deaths, mostly in young children and the elderly.

Norovirus spreads very easily and quickly

- It only takes a very small amount of norovirus particles (fewer than 100) to make you sick.
- People with norovirus illness shed billions of virus particles in their stool and vomit and can easily infect others.
- You are contagious from the moment you begin feeling sick and for the first few days after you recover.
- Norovirus can spread quickly in enclosed places like daycare centers, nursing homes, schools, and cruise ships.
- Norovirus can stay on objects and surfaces and still infect people for days or weeks.
- Norovirus can survive some disinfectants, making it hard to get rid of.

Norovirus can spread in many ways

Norovirus can spread to others by—

- having direct contact with an infected person, for example, touching an infected person while caring for them,
- eating food or drinking liquids that are contaminated with norovirus,
- touching objects that have norovirus on them and then putting your fingers in your mouth, for example, touching a countertop that has vomit droplets on it and then putting your fingers in your mouth and
- sharing utensils or cups with people who are infected with norovirus.

There's no vaccine to prevent norovirus infection and no drug to treat it

- Antibiotics will not help with norovirus illness because antibiotics do not work on viruses.
- When you have norovirus illness, drink plenty of liquids to replace fluid loss and prevent dehydration.
- If you or someone you are caring for is dehydrated, call a doctor.



What is the Right Way to Wash Your Hands?

1. Wet your hands with clean, running water (warm or cold) and apply soap.
 2. Rub your hands together to make a lather and scrub them well; be sure to scrub the backs of your hands, between your fingers, and under your nails.
 3. Continue rubbing your hands for at least 20 seconds. Need a timer? Hum the "Happy Birthday" song from beginning to end twice.
 4. Rinse your hands well under running water.
 5. Dry your hands using a clean towel or air dry them.
- See Handwashing: Clean Hands Saves Lives (www.cdc.gov/handwashing/)

5 Tips to Prevent Norovirus From Spreading

1. Practice proper hand hygiene

Always wash your hands carefully with soap and water—

- after using the toilet and changing diapers, and
- before eating, preparing, or handling food.

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.

2. Wash fruits and vegetables and cook seafood thoroughly

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.

3. When you are sick, do not prepare food or care for others

You should not prepare food for others or provide healthcare while you are sick and for at least 2 to 3 days after you recover. This also applies to sick workers in schools, daycares, and other places where they may expose people to norovirus.

4. Clean and disinfect contaminated surfaces

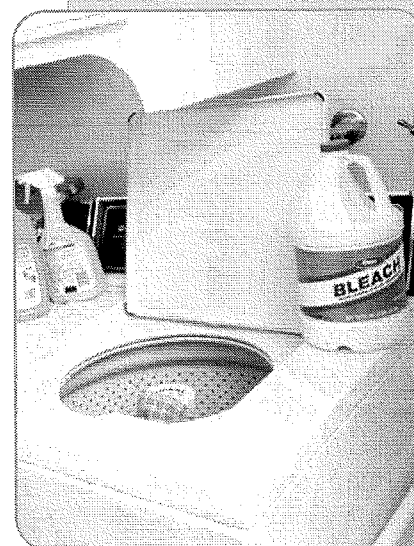
After throwing up or having diarrhea, immediately clean and disinfect contaminated surfaces. Use a chlorine bleach solution with a concentration of 1000–5000 ppm (5–25 tablespoons of household bleach [5.25%] per gallon of water) or other disinfectant registered as effective against norovirus by the Environmental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

5. Wash laundry thoroughly

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.



Visit CDC's Norovirus Web site at www.cdc.gov/norovirus for more information.