



Frequently asked questions about Norovirus

From the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency

What are noroviruses?

Noroviruses are a group of viruses that cause what is commonly called the “stomach flu,” in people. Like all viral infections, noroviruses are not affected by treatment with antibiotics, and cannot grow outside of a person’s body.

What are the symptoms of illness caused by noroviruses?

The symptoms of norovirus illness usually include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and some stomach cramping. Sometimes people additionally have a low-grade fever, chills, headache, muscle aches, and a general sense of tiredness. The illness often begins suddenly, and the infected person may feel very sick. In most people the symptoms last for about 1 or 2 days. In general, children experience more vomiting than adults. Most people with norovirus illness have both of these symptoms.

How serious is norovirus disease?

People may feel very sick and vomit many times a day, but most people get better within 1 or 2 days, and they have no long-term health effects related to their illness. However, sometimes people are unable to drink enough liquids to replace the liquids they lost because of vomiting and diarrhea. These persons can become dehydrated and may need special medical attention. This problem with dehydration is usually only seen among the very young, the elderly, and persons with weakened immune systems.

How do people become infected with noroviruses?

Noroviruses are found in the stool or vomit of infected people. People can become infected with the virus in several ways, including:

- eating food or drinking liquids that are contaminated with norovirus;
- touching surfaces or objects contaminated with norovirus, and then placing their hand in their mouth;
- having direct contact with another person who is infected and showing symptoms (for example, when caring for someone with illness, or sharing foods or eating utensils with someone who is ill).

Persons working in day-care centers or nursing homes should pay special attention to children or residents who have norovirus illness. This virus is very contagious and can spread rapidly throughout such environments.

When do symptoms appear?

Symptoms of norovirus illness usually begin about 24 to 48 hours after ingestion of the virus, but they can appear as early as 12 hours after exposure.

Are noroviruses contagious?

Noroviruses are very contagious and can spread easily from person to person. Both stool and vomit are infectious. Particular care should be taken with young children in diapers who may have diarrhea.

How long are people contagious?

People infected with norovirus are contagious from the moment they begin feeling ill to at least 3 days after recovery. Some people may be contagious for as long as 2 weeks after recovery. Therefore, it is particularly important for people to use good handwashing and other hygienic practices after they have recently recovered from norovirus illness.

If I had it already, can I get it again?

Norovirus illness can occur throughout a person's lifetime. In addition, because of differences in genetic factors, some people are more likely to become infected and develop more severe illness than others.

What treatment is available for people with norovirus infection?

Currently, there is no antiviral medication that works against norovirus and there is no vaccine to prevent infection. Norovirus infection cannot be treated with antibiotics. This is because antibiotics work to fight bacteria and not viruses.

Treatment (or no treatment)

Norovirus illness is usually brief in healthy individuals. When people are ill with vomiting and diarrhea, they should drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration. Dehydration among young children, the elderly, the sick, can be common, and it is the most serious health effect that can result from norovirus infection. By drinking fluids like juice or water, people can reduce their chance of becoming dehydrated. Sports drinks do not replace the nutrients and minerals lost during this illness.

Can norovirus infections be prevented?

You can decrease your chance of coming in contact with noroviruses by following these preventive steps:

- Frequently wash your hands, especially after toilet visits and changing diapers and before eating or preparing food.
- Carefully wash fruits and vegetables, and steam oysters 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 vomit and/or stool in the toilet and make sure that the surrounding area is kept clean.

Persons who are infected with norovirus should not prepare food while they have symptoms and for 3 days after they recover from their illness (see [food handler information sheet](#)). Food that may have been contaminated by an ill person should be disposed of properly.

You can learn more about norovirus from the CDC at:

www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/submenus/sub_norwalk.htm

Or you can look us up on the web at:

www.bhsj.org

Or call your local Health Department office at:

Coldwater
517-279-9561 x 143

Hillsdale
517-437-7395 x 110

Sturgis
269-659-4013 x 109

Three Rivers
269-273-2161 x 241