



Jefferson County Public Health

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Norovirus Fact Sheet

What are noroviruses?

Noroviruses (also known as Norwalk-like viruses, caliciviruses, and small round structured viruses) cause acute gastroenteritis. Gastroenteritis is the inflammation of the stomach and intestines, and usually causes nausea, vomiting, and/or diarrhea. This infection is often mistakenly referred to as the “stomach flu” – it is not related to the flu (influenza). Humans are the only known reservoir for norovirus. Outbreaks of norovirus have occurred in many different settings, including restaurants, catered events, schools, child care centers, camps, cruise ships, vacation settings, swimming pools, hospitals and long-term care facilities.

How do I get norovirus?

Noroviruses are extremely infectious, and are highly concentrated in the stool and/or vomit of infected people. People can become infected in several ways:

- Transmission is primarily person-to-person via the fecal-oral route, either by consumption of fecally contaminated food or water, although airborne and fomite transmission may occur during outbreaks. Good evidence exists for transmission due to aerosolization of vomitus that presumably results in droplets contaminating surfaces or entering the oral mucosa and being swallowed. No evidence suggests that infection occurs through the respiratory system.
- The virus has a low infectious dose (< 100 viral particles), which allows for easy spread from person to person. If people do not properly wash their hands after using the restroom or changing a diaper, and then touch food others will eat or objects people will put in their mouths (e.g., toys), they can spread norovirus to other people.
- People are most contagious from the moment they begin feeling ill until at least 3 days after diarrhea and/or vomiting subsides. However, the virus has been detected in stool as long as 2 weeks after exposure to the virus, and some people may be asymptomatic yet still shed the virus.
- Some people may carry and spread norovirus without ever having symptoms.

Symptoms

Onset of symptoms is sudden. Symptoms begin 12-48 hours (usually 1-2 days) after ingesting the virus. The illness is usually brief, with symptoms lasting 12-60 hours.

Symptoms can include:

- Nausea
- Diarrhea (not bloody)
- Vomiting (more prevalent among children)
- Stomach pain and cramping
- Low-grade fever
- Headache
- Severe dehydration, although rare, can be fatal, especially among older persons with debilitating health conditions.



Hand washing steps:

1. Use soap and warm running water.
2. Scrub hands for at least 20 seconds; use a nail brush.
3. Wash all surfaces:
 - Between fingers
 - Under fingernails
 - Back of hands
 - Wrists
4. Rinse well and dry hands with a clean paper towel.

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Norovirus Fact Sheet (continued)

Prevention

- Wash your hands before preparing food, eating or handling dishes or baby toys.
- Always wash your hands after using the restroom, diaper changing or toilet training.
- Persons with norovirus should not prepare food for others.

Treatment of norovirus

There is no antiviral medication for treatment, nor is there a vaccine for prevention of norovirus.. Most symptoms will go away on their own in a few days. If symptoms persist or are severe, see your health care provider. It is important to prevent dehydration by drinking fluids such as juice and water.

If you think you have norovirus

- Do not prepare food for others.
- If your job includes food handling, working in healthcare or with children, do not go to work and see your healthcare provider.
- Children who have norovirus should not go to child care settings – especially if they have diarrhea.