

Norovirus Information Sheet

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What is it?

Norovirus is a group of viruses that cause gastroenteritis, also known as gastro or the tummy bug. Norovirus is a common cause of gastro outbreaks in day-care centres, cruise ships and rest homes.

Norovirus is highly infectious, which means it spreads very easily from person-to-person.

What are the signs and symptoms?

Symptoms usually start between 10 - 50 hours after contact with the virus and last 1 to 3 days. Some people may be unwell for longer.

Symptoms often begin suddenly and include:

- vomiting (often projectile - when vomit forcefully flies out of the mouth)
- stomach pain
- nausea (sickness in the stomach and an urge to vomit)
- diarrhoea, pronounced dy-a-rea (runny poo).

You may also have a headache, fever, chills and muscle aches. Some people who are infected do not have any symptoms.

It is possible to have Norovirus more than once.

How serious is it?

Norovirus is not usually serious and most people recover quickly without having to see a doctor. If the symptoms are severe, some people may need to be treated at hospital, particularly the very young and the elderly if they get dehydrated.

A person with Norovirus symptoms should see a doctor or nurse if they:

- are less than 6 months old
- have diarrhoea and stomach cramps for more than 24 hours or symptoms get worse

- have a high temperature, go pale or limp or are unusually tired, drowsy or irritable
- have blood, mucus or pus in their poo
- are not drinking and show signs of dehydration, such as not weeing or only producing small amounts of dark wee or having a dry mouth
- have other health problems or symptoms.

If you have seen a doctor or nurse and your symptoms do not improve or get worse, you will need to see them again.

When Norovirus affects a group of people, or if you have Norovirus and are involved in a job where it could be easily spread, such as working with food, or in childcare or health care, your doctor may need to tell the District Health Board (DHB).

Who is most at risk?

Norovirus affects people of all ages. You are more likely to get Norovirus if you:

- have contact with sick people
- have poor hand hygiene or food hygiene
- attend day care, school or live in a dormitory, hostel or rest home
- have a weak immune system, such as the young, elderly and people with severe medical conditions.

Children who are 5 years old and younger, adults over 65 years old and people with weak immune systems are more likely to have severe symptoms.

How could I get infected?

You get infected when you swallow or breathe in the virus. This can happen when you:

- touch contaminated surfaces or objects such as door handles and towels

- have contact with an infected person such as caring for them or eating from the same plate or cutlery as them
- consume contaminated food or drinks
- breathe in small amounts of the virus released in to the air when an infected person vomits.

Norovirus can be passed on to other people while the virus is still in your body and poo – this can be up to 4 weeks after your symptoms start.

How do I protect myself and others?

There is no vaccine to prevent Norovirus.

Norovirus can survive on surfaces, such as toys and door handles, for weeks.

To avoid getting Norovirus:

- regularly wash your hands with soap and dry them thoroughly, especially after contact with animals, going to the toilet, changing a nappy, caring for a sick person and before preparing or eating food
- use household chlorine bleach mixed with water to disinfect surfaces and items that have touched poo or vomit
- get your shellfish from a safe, reputable supplier
- cook all food thoroughly to kill any viruses
- only drink water that is treated and known to be safe. If you are not sure if the water is safe boil it first. If you have your own water supply, protect it from animal and bird poo and treat the water
- avoid visiting any place that has a Norovirus outbreak.

To avoid spreading Norovirus:

- regularly wash and dry your hands thoroughly
- open doors and windows to let fresh air into the room after vomiting
- use household chlorine bleach mixed with water to disinfect areas where vomit and poo have spilled and clean surfaces and items you use often
- if you need to visit your doctor tell the receptionist or nurse about your symptoms

before you go so that the practice can decide if infection control measures need to be put in place

- avoid contact with children, adults over 65 years old and people with weak immune systems until you have had no symptoms for 48 hours (2 days)
- do not prepare food for others until you have had no symptoms for 2 days
- do not go swimming in pools until you have had no symptoms for 2 weeks.

Will I need to take time off work, school or preschool?

Anyone with diarrhoea or vomiting should not go to work, school or day-care until they have had no symptoms for 2 days. This is especially important for food handlers, health care workers, childcare workers and children at school or day-care.

How is it treated?

There is no specific treatment for Norovirus. Most people with Norovirus can be looked after at home and will not need to see a doctor. It is important to rest and drink plenty of water to prevent dehydration.

Do not take medicine to stop vomiting or diarrhoea as this will stop your body getting rid of the virus. However, if you see a doctor they may give you medicine to stop vomiting or diarrhoea if they are worried you are getting dehydrated.

Antibiotics will not work on Norovirus because they kill bacteria not viruses.

Where can I get further information?

For further information on Norovirus please contact your doctor or Hawke's Bay District Health Board Population Health on (06) 834 1815. You can also phone Healthline on 0800 611 116 at any time of the day or night to speak to a registered nurse.