

Norovirus Fact Sheet

What are noroviruses?

Noroviruses are a group of viruses that cause irritation and inflammation of the stomach and intestines. It is known incorrectly as the “stomach flu”. It is NOT related to the flu (influenza), which is a respiratory illness.

What are the symptoms of a norovirus infection?

Norovirus illness usually begins 24-48 hours after exposure, but can appear as early as 10 hours after exposure. Symptoms usually include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and stomach cramping. Sometimes people have a low-grade fever, chills, headache, muscle aches, and a general sense of tiredness. The illness is usually brief, with symptoms lasting only 1 or 2 days and no long-term health effects from the illness.

How serious is norovirus disease?

It is usually not serious, but people may feel very sick. Sometimes people are unable to drink enough liquids to replace what they lose from vomiting and diarrhea, can become dehydrated and need to see a doctor. This problem usually occurs only among the very young, the elderly, and persons with weakened immune systems. Symptoms of dehydration are decrease in urination, dry mouth and throat, and feeling dizzy when standing up.

How is norovirus spread?

The virus is found in the stool or vomit of infected persons. People become infected by eating food or drinking liquids that are contaminated, touching surfaces that are contaminated and then touching your mouth, having direct contact with someone who is infected, and eating raw or undercooked oysters from contaminated waters.

How long are people contagious?

People infected 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. Good hand washing is important. Persons who are sick should not prepare food while they have symptoms and for 3 days after they recover.

What treatment is available for people with norovirus infection?

No specific medication or vaccine exists. By drinking fluids, such as juice or water, people can reduce their chance of dehydration. Sports drinks do not replace the nutrients and minerals lost during this illness.

Do infected people need to be excluded from school, work, or daycare?

Since the virus is passed in vomit and stool, children should not go to daycare or school while they have diarrhea or vomiting. Once illness ends, children can return to daycare, but hand washing must be watched.

Can norovirus infections be prevented?

You can decrease your chances of becoming infected with norovirus by:

- Frequent hand washing with warm water and soap (NOT alcohol based hand sanitizers)
- Promptly disinfecting contaminated surfaces with household chlorine bleach-based cleaners
- Washing soiled clothing and linens
- Avoid food or water from sources that may be contaminated and wash fruits and vegetables thoroughly
- Cooking oysters completely to kill the virus

Norovirus Cleaning and Disinfection Guidelines

General Warning: Chlorine bleach is corrosive and irritating to mucosal tissue, skin, eyes and respiratory tract. Please read the label and follow all manufacturer's recommendations and warnings. Avoid spray bottle application and use only in a well-ventilated area. Chlorine bleach may damage fabrics and other surfaces. Please spot test an area before applying to a surface.

Examples of items to disinfect:

Doorknobs, faucets, sinks, toilets, commodes, bath rails, phones, counters, chairs (including backs), tables, hand rails, light switches, keyboards, etc. within a 25 foot radius of a vomiting incident. Steam clean carpets /upholstery and launder any clothes/linens contaminated with vomit or feces.

What works best: Chlorine bleach (regular, not splashless type). A new bottle of bleach should be used, if possible, as bleach may lose its effectiveness after being open for more than 30 days.

Chlorine bleach concentrations and mixing instructions:

- **For stainless steel, food/mouth contact items, toys**
 - 1 Tablespoon of bleach in 1-gallon water
- **For non-porous surfaces, tile floors, counter-tops, sinks, toilets**
 - 1/3-cup bleach in 1-gallon water

Specific Clean-up Procedures

1. Pre-clean any visible vomit or feces with disposable paper towel or other absorbent material and place in trash.
2. Disinfect area and objects surrounding where the vomiting or diarrhea occurred with the appropriate bleach dilution.
3. Seal and discard trash immediately

Hard surfaces

- Disinfect with appropriate bleach solution, rinse with water if food preparation area. A bucket of bleach solution and rag are suggested. Clean the least contaminated areas first, leaving the most contaminated areas for last.

Carpet / Upholstered Furniture

- Visible vomit or feces should be cleaned with disposable paper towel or other absorbent material and placed in the trash. Disinfecting with bleach may discolor carpet or upholstery – steam cleaning should be used.

Linens / clothing / textiles

- Visible vomit or feces should be carefully removed with disposable paper towel or other absorbent material and placed in the trash. Keep contaminated clothes/linens separated from uncontaminated laundry. Minimize the handling of soiled items and wash immediately. Wash items in a pre-wash cycle first, then use a regular wash cycle and detergent at the hottest setting safe for the fabrics. Dry separately from uncontaminated clothing at the highest temperature safe for the fabric.