

What is norovirus?

Norovirus is a virus (a type of germ much smaller than bacteria) that causes gastro-intestinal illness. In the past it has been known by many names: Norwalk-like virus, SRSV (small round structured virus), gastric flu, and winter vomiting disease.

What illness results from infection?

The incubation period, which is the time from first swallowing the virus to becoming ill, is 12-48 hours.

The main symptom is **vomiting**, but people also suffer from:

- Diarrhoea
- Nausea
- Abdominal cramps
- Headache
- Muscle aches
- Chills and fever

How does it spread?

The virus only infects humans. Illness is able to spread when virus particles from an infected person get into the gut of another person. This can happen in several ways:

- Poor hygiene after going to the toilet

- Virus particles spread in the air from vomit when someone has been sick
- Virus particles can fall onto any object in the environment and be picked up by another person
- Via contaminated food or water
- Shellfish (e.g., oysters) from sewage contaminated water

How are infections treated?

There is no specific treatment.

Symptoms usually last 24-48 hours. Although it is unpleasant, most people make a full and speedy recovery.

It is important to drink plenty to make sure that you don't become dehydrated. Clear fluids like water and diluted fruit juice are recommended.

Should I see my GP?

You should consult your GP if one or more of the following applies to you:

- there is blood in your diarrhoea
- you have severe abdominal pain
- the diarrhoea has lasted for 48 hours

How can infection be prevented?

Good standards of personal and food hygiene will help to prevent spread. Unfortunately it spreads very quickly, especially where groups of people are together such as in schools or care homes. Always:

- Wash hands after using the toilet or changing nappies
- Cook raw shellfish before eating
- Wash fruit and salads before eating

How should hands be washed?

Always use warm, running water and a mild, preferably liquid, soap. (It is not necessary to use soaps labelled as antiseptic or antibacterial.)

- Wet hands and apply a small amount of soap
- Rub hands together vigorously for 10-15 seconds
- Pay special attention to areas between fingers, finger tips, and palms.
- Rinse hands under warm running water
- Dry thoroughly on a clean dry towel.

If someone in your household has norovirus:

- The infected person should not prepare food.
- Soiled bedding and clothes should be washed on the hot cycle of your washing machine.
- Clean surfaces (toilet seats, flush handles, door handles and taps) at least daily with bleach diluted as per manufacturer's instructions.
- If cleaning up diarrhoea or vomit, wear rubber gloves; wash the surface with hot soapy water, rinse, and allow to dry. Use paper towels or disposable cloths, and dispose of carefully and immediately in a plastic bag (e.g., used carrier).
- The infected person should not share towels/flannels with anyone.

All persons with diarrhoea should remain off work or school until they have had no symptoms for 48 hours.

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