

Norovirus Disease

What is norovirus?

Norovirus is a very contagious virus that causes the "stomach flu," or vomiting and diarrhea, in people.

Who gets norovirus disease?

Anyone can be infected with norovirus and get sick. Because there are many different strains of norovirus, people who have been sick with norovirus can get it again throughout their lifetime.

How is norovirus spread?

The virus is found in the stool and vomit of infected people and can spread easily from person to person. People infected with norovirus are most contagious from the time they first start feeling ill through three days after they feel well again. People sometimes remain contagious for up to a month after they have recovered. People can become infected by eating food or drinking liquids that are contaminated by infected food handlers, touching surfaces or objects contaminated with norovirus and then touching their mouth before hand washing, or having direct contact with another person who is infected and then touching their mouth before hand washing. Therefore, good hand washing is the key to preventing the spread of norovirus.

What are the symptoms of norovirus disease?

Symptoms usually include nausea, vomiting and/or diarrhea, and stomach cramping. Sometimes people have a low-grade fever, chills, headache, muscle aches, and a general sense of tiredness.

How soon after exposure do symptoms appear?

Norovirus disease usually begins 12-48 hours after exposure, but can appear as early as 10 hours after exposure. The illness is usually brief, with symptoms lasting one to three days.

How is norovirus diagnosed?

Norovirus is usually diagnosed based on the patient's symptoms. In outbreaks, public health laboratories might conduct special tests on some ill persons to confirm the cause of the outbreak.

What is the treatment for norovirus disease?

Currently, there is no specific medication or vaccine for norovirus disease, and it cannot be treated with antibiotics. Drinking plenty of liquids, such as juice or water, is important to replace fluids and prevent dehydration. Mild dehydration can be treated with oral fluids obtained from a pharmacy. Persons who become severely dehydrated should seek medical care.

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How can norovirus be prevented?

Norovirus disease can be prevented in a number of ways, including:

- hand washing after using the restroom, changing diapers, sneezing, coughing, and before and after preparing food;
- disinfecting contaminated surfaces with household chlorine bleach-based cleaners;
- washing clothing and linens if they become soiled;
- washing fruits and vegetables thoroughly before eating;
- avoiding food or water from sources that may be contaminated;
- cooking seafood completely.

Persons infected with norovirus should not prepare food while they have symptoms and for at least two days after they recover.

How can I get more information about norovirus?

- 1) If you have concerns about norovirus, contact your healthcare provider.
- 2) Call your local health department. A directory of local health departments is located at <http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/LHD/index.htm>.
- 3) Visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at <http://www.cdc.gov/norovirus/index.html>.