



Norovirus FAQ

What is norovirus?

Norovirus is one of a larger group of viruses called caliciviruses. You might hear it called Norwalk virus or 'stomach flu'. Infection with these viruses is a common cause of gastrointestinal illness worldwide. It is not related to influenza or the 'flu'.

What are the symptoms of an infection with norovirus?

The most common symptoms are sudden onset of nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and cramps. These symptoms occur in all age groups although diarrhea is more common among adults and vomiting is more common among children. Many people also experience headache, fever, chills, and muscle aches.

How are these viruses spread?

Noroviruses are spread by:

- eating food contaminated with stool or vomit from an infected person
- drinking water or other fluids contaminated with stool or vomit from an infected person
- person-to-person contact
- virus spreading through the air during vomiting

How soon do symptoms appear?

The symptoms may appear from 12-72 hours after exposure to the virus, but usually within 24 to 48 hours.

What is the treatment for this illness?

There is no treatment for this illness. Most people recover in two to three days after they become ill. It is important to ensure adequate fluid intake to prevent dehydration.

My child has already been ill. Are they immune?

You can get norovirus illness many times in your life. One reason for this is that there are different types of noroviruses. Being infected with one type of norovirus may not protect you against other types. Immunity to any of these viruses is short-lived. There is no vaccine for norovirus.

Should I notify someone if my child is ill?

You need to call your school nurse if your child will be absent. You do not need to notify the health department. You should seek medical attention if you are concerned that your child is becoming dehydrated. Some signs of dehydration include decreased urination, dryness in the mouth, increasing fatigue, or lethargy. If you are a parent of an ill special needs child, you may want to notify your health care provider for guidance.

How long will my child be infectious? When can my child return to school?

People are infectious while symptoms are present and for at least three days after diarrhea or vomiting have stopped.

We ask that you keep your child home if they are not feeling well. If they are ill, they should remain at home until diarrhea and vomiting have completely stopped **and** they feel well enough to attend school.

No one should prepare food for others, work in food service, child care (including babysitting), or patient care while ill, and they should not return to these activities until three days after diarrhea and vomiting have stopped.

Should I keep my well child home from school or other events if others are ill?

You do not need to keep your well child at home. They should practice good hygiene, thoroughly washing their hands for 20 seconds with soap and water after using the bathroom and before eating.

What can be done to help prevent the spread of these viruses?

Thorough hand washing for 20 seconds with soap and water before handling food and after using the toilet is the best way to prevent the spread of these viruses. You should also wash more often if anyone in your household is ill or when in contact with contaminated surfaces or items.

Do hand gels work against norovirus?

If soap and water are not available, you may use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. These alcohol-based products may help reduce the number of germs on hands in some situations, but they should not be considered an adequate substitute. They may be used in addition to soap and water.

What should I use to clean contaminated surfaces?

After throwing up or having diarrhea, immediately clean and disinfect contaminated surfaces. Use a chlorine bleach solution with a concentration of 1000–5000 ppm (5–25 tablespoons of household bleach [5.25%] per gallon of water) or other disinfectant registered as effective against norovirus by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

How should I launder linens and bedding?

Immediately remove and wash clothing or linens that may be contaminated with vomit or stool. Handle soiled items carefully—without agitating them—to avoid spreading virus. If available, wear rubber or disposable gloves while handling soiled clothing or linens and wash your hands after handling. The items should be washed with detergent at the maximum available cycle length and then machine dried.

Where can I find more information on norovirus?

State of Alaska Norovirus Information <http://dhss.alaska.gov/dph/Epi/id/Pages/dod/norovirus.aspx>

Centers for Disease Control Norovirus Information <http://www.cdc.gov/norovirus>

If you have any more questions, call the State of Alaska Section of Epidemiology at 907-269-8000.