

Noroviruses

What are noroviruses?

Noroviruses are a group of viruses that cause the “stomach flu” or gastroenteritis. The term norovirus is the official name for this group of viruses but they are also called Norwalk-like viruses (NLVs) and caliciviruses (because they belong to the virus family Caliciviridae).

What are the symptoms of norovirus?

The symptoms of norovirus illness usually begin suddenly and include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea and stomach cramps. Sometimes, people have a low-grade fever, chills, headache, muscle aches and fatigue. The symptoms usually last one to three days.

Norovirus infections occur throughout the year but are more common in winter. All age groups are affected.

How is the virus spread?

The main source of the virus is stool and vomit from infected persons:

- The virus can be spread from person-to-person on unwashed hands.
- The virus can also be spread by food, water or ice that has been handled by a sick person.
- Vomiting may spread the virus short distances through the air.
- The virus can survive on surfaces such as door handles, countertops or sink taps for a long time.

Noroviruses are easily spread in settings where people are in close contact, including schools, day-care centres, long-term care facilities, health-care facilities and cruise ships.

People can spread noroviruses while they are ill and up to three or four days after recovery. Some people may be contagious for as long as two weeks after their symptoms resolve. It is important that people wash their hands carefully even after they have recovered.

What is the treatment for norovirus infections?

Healthy people usually recover on their own in about 48 hours. There are no medications available to treat this infection.

You should drink plenty of fluids in order to prevent dehydration. If the vomiting or diarrhea lasts for more than two to three days, you should see a doctor.

What should I do if I or someone in my family is sick with vomiting and diarrhea?

- Stay home from work or school.
- Wash your hands frequently, especially after using the bathroom or changing diapers and before eating or preparing food.
- Thoroughly clean floors, counters and furniture. Bathrooms need extra attention.
- Don't share glasses or dishes.

Some tips on how to properly wash your hands:

- Wet your hands with warm running water.
- Add soap and scrub for 10 to 15 seconds. Wash all parts of your hands - the back, between fingers, thumbs and under the nails.
- Rinse off soap under running water for 5 to 10 seconds.
- Dry your hands with a towel.
- Turn off tap with a towel.
- Use separate towels for sick family members.

How should I clean the house if someone is sick with vomiting or diarrhea?

- First, clean the area with your usual household cleaner. Use separate cloths for the sink and for the toilet.
- Then, disinfect with a household cleaner that contains bleach or make your own bleach solution by diluting 20mL (4 teaspoons) of bleach in a litre of water. Make this solution fresh each time you need it.
- Wash your hands after cleaning.

When cleaning up vomit or feces:

- You can wear gloves (e.g. dishwashing or disposable gloves) for cleaning but they are not essential. Do not use the gloves for anything else other than cleaning.
- Use paper towels to soak up liquids and remove solid material. Throw away the paper towels in a garbage bag.
- Clean the soiled area with detergent and water. Do not use the cloth or sponge for other areas of the house as this might spread the virus.
- Wipe the area with household disinfectant that contains bleach or a bleach solution. Make sure the disinfectant is safe for the surface being cleaned. Do not use bleach on carpets or fabrics.
- Do not vacuum carpets that have been soiled with vomit or feces. Clean as above and if possible, follow up with steam cleaning.
- Wash your hands after cleaning even if you wore gloves.

How do I clean soiled laundry when someone is sick with vomiting or diarrhea?

Bedding and clothing that has been soiled or used by an ill family member can be washed with regular laundry. Do not shake out soiled sheets or clothes. Heavily soiled articles should be rinsed to remove any solid matter. Use regular laundry detergent; wash in hot water and dry using as warm a setting as possible. Wash your hands after handling soiled laundry.

For more information on noroviruses, visit
http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/id-mi/norovirus_e.html

For more information on proper handwashing, visit
http://www.chica.org/links_handhygiene.html