



Winter health advice

Norovirus - (Winter Vomiting Disease)

With winter fast approaching now is the time to start getting prepared. Colds and flu are a constant hazard during the winter months – as is norovirus (winter vomiting disease).

Below are some frequently asked questions to help you get to grips with one of winter's most dreaded viruses.

Frequently asked Questions

What are noroviruses?

Noroviruses are a group of viruses that are the most common cause of gastroenteritis (stomach bugs) in the UK.

What are the symptoms?

The most common symptoms are nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea. Symptoms often start with the sudden onset of nausea followed by projectile vomiting and watery diarrhoea.

Not everyone will experience all of the symptoms. Some people may also have a raised temperature, headaches and aching limbs.

Symptoms usually begin around 12 to 48 hours after becoming infected. The illness is self-limiting and the symptoms will last for 12 to 60 hours. Most people make a full recovery within 1-2 days, however some people (usually the very young or elderly) may become very dehydrated and require hospital treatment.

Who is at risk of getting norovirus?

There is no one specific group who are at risk of contracting norovirus – it affects people of all ages. The very young and elderly should take extra care if infected, as dehydration is more common in these age groups.

How is norovirus treated?

There is no specific treatment for norovirus apart from letting the illness run its course. It is important to drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration.

How common is norovirus?

The number of outbreaks varies each year but recent research suggests that around two million cases of norovirus occur in the community each year.

Are there any long-term effects?

No, there are no long-term effects from norovirus.

How does norovirus spread?

The virus is easily transmitted from one person to another. It can be transmitted by:

- contact with an infected person
- consuming contaminated food or water or

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- contact with contaminated surfaces or objects.

Why does norovirus often cause outbreaks?

Norovirus often causes outbreaks because it's easily spread from one person to another and the virus is able to survive in the environment for many days. There are many strains of the virus so having one bout won't prevent you from being ill again.

Outbreaks commonly occur in semi-closed environments, where people are in close contact with one another for long periods. These include:

- hospitals
- nursing homes
- schools and
- cruise ships.

How can these outbreaks be prevented?

Outbreaks can be difficult to control because norovirus is easily transmitted from one person to another. Also, the virus can survive in the environment for lengthy periods.

The most effective way to respond to an outbreak is to keep to good hygiene measures. These include strict adherence to hand-washing especially:

- when handling food
- after contact with infected people, and
- after using the toilet.

Other methods include:

- disinfecting contaminated areas promptly
- not allowing infected people to prepare food until 48 hours after symptoms have elapsed and
- isolating ill people for up to 48 hours after their symptoms have ceased.

If I'm suffering from norovirus, how can I prevent others from becoming infected?

Good hygiene is important in preventing others from becoming infected – regular hand washing is the most effective.

PLEASE NOTE: It is important that those infected stay away from work for 48 hours after their symptoms have ceased as they may still be infectious.

Margaret Murray
CIGNA UK Occupational Health Manager
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