



Factsheet on norovirus

An information leaflet for health and social care staff

What is norovirus?

Norovirus, also called small round structured virus (SRSV) or Norwalk-like virus (NLV), is a common source of gastroenteritis.

The illness caused is often known as 'winter vomiting disease'. Although it is true that there is an increase in winter months, unfortunately, cases do occur in all seasons.

The illness characteristically starts with the sudden onset of nausea, vomiting &/or diarrhoea and the person feels lethargic for a day or so.

In general the symptoms usually last for about 24 – 72 hours.

There are usually no long-term effects of norovirus infection, however some people can become severely dehydrated.

Antibiotic treatment has no effect upon norovirus infection.

How is norovirus spread?

Norovirus is highly infectious and may be caught:

- by direct contact with an infected person especially their vomit or diarrhoea e.g. being close to a person when they vomit or when cleaning up after them
- from food that has been prepared by someone with the virus
- from food contaminated by the virus from someone with symptoms e.g. fruit at a bedside
- from food that was contaminated at source, such as oysters, from sewage polluted sea
- via surfaces that have been contaminated with the virus after someone has vomited in the vicinity, as the virus can survive in the environment for some time, possibly days

- by breathing in and swallowing the virus that is in the air around someone who has just vomited, or from a person who is incubating norovirus infection
- following exposure to the virus it usually takes between 12 and 48 hours for someone to become ill with symptoms
- norovirus is not caught from animals

Looking after someone who is ill with norovirus

The person who is ill with norovirus should stay at home and not go to work, school etc. until they have been completely free from symptoms for 48 hours (this includes nausea). This includes Staff Members.

Drinking fluids should be encouraged, especially in children and elderly people to prevent dehydration.

To control the spread of the virus, good hand hygiene, cleanliness of the environment and good food hygiene are essential.

Hand Hygiene (using liquid soap and water and paper towels)

Everyone should regularly wash & dry their hands especially:

Before:

- preparing or serving food
- eating meals

After:

- contact with a sick person and their surroundings i.e. sick room, bedding, clothing & equipment
- going to the toilet &/or assisting a sick person to go to the toilet
- leaving the area where the person has vomited or had diarrhoea

Environmental hygiene

Both diarrhoea and vomit are highly infectious so care is needed when dealing with them.

Cleaning up vomit or diarrhoea:

- Protect yourself by wearing CE marked non powdered disposable gloves and a polythene disposable apron
- Soak up any liquid with paper towels and dispose of in the appropriate refuse bin
- Scoop up the solid mess and flush down the toilet if possible

The area should then be thoroughly washed with detergent and hot water followed by a good quality chlorine based (hypochlorite) bleach solution made to British Standard.

Take special care to dilute any bleach as instructed by the manufacturer & never mix different types of chemical as the fumes can be dangerous.

Store bleach safely and ensure that children do not have access to these solutions.

Once cleaned, the area should be rinsed with clean water and allowed to dry.

For cleaning vomit or diarrhoea from carpets it is best to clean the area with a proprietary carpet shampoo or steam cleaner, if available. In the absence of this type of equipment a thorough cleaning with hot water and detergent will suffice. Always rinse with clean water and allow to dry before using the area again.

Horizontal surfaces in the vicinity of the vomit should be cleaned with hot soapy water, rinsed & dried.

After cleaning, dispose of the apron, gloves & cleaning cloths in the appropriate refuse bin.

When finished always wash and dry your hands.

Cleaning toilets and basins

Disposable non powdered gloves and polythene apron should be worn, and use detergent and hot water to clean the following at least twice a day and after every use by an infected person, in the following order:

- Wash-hand basin taps
- Toilet door handles
- Flush handles
- Toilet seats

Cloths, gloves & aprons used for cleaning must be disposed of in the appropriate refuse bin.

When finished always wash and dry your hands

Care of soiled articles/linen

If urinals and bedpans are used, the carer should wear CE marked disposable non powdered gloves and a disposable apron when attending the patient.

Bedpans and urinals should be carefully emptied into the toilet bowl and then washed with detergent and hot water, rinsed and allowed to dry.

Soiled clothing and bed linen should be washed separately in a washing machine on a 'hot cycle'.

If the soiling is very heavy, flush away as much as possible into the toilet bowl. Take care as rough handling may cause the virus to float into the air, be swallowed / inhaled and cause further infection.

After loading the washing machine, the outer surfaces should be cleaned with detergent and hot water. This is especially important if the machine is where children are likely to play. When finished always wash and dry your hands

Food hygiene

Food that the ill person may have prepared whilst symptomatic should be disposed of.

If the food is to be cooked and then served hot it should be safe but salads, fruit and other cold dishes not receiving further cooking have a risk of being contaminated with the virus and making others ill.

If the person has vomited in the food handling area then it must be thoroughly cleaned up (see below) and all horizontal surfaces washed with detergent and hot water and then sanitised using a hypochlorite bleach solution (1000ppm) or a combined detergent / hypochlorite cleaning product.

Symptomatic people should not prepare or handle food for others until they have been completely free of symptoms for 48 hours (this includes nausea).

This factsheet has been reviewed by a multi-disciplinary team from the North West.

Further advice may be obtained from Cumbria and Lancashire Public Health England Centre. Telephone 0844 225 0602