

What are Noroviruses (NVs)?

Noroviruses (also known as Norwalk viruses or Small Round Structured Viruses) are the most common cause of outbreaks of gastroenteritis in humans. Sometimes this condition is referred to as 'winter vomiting disease' and is characterised by diarrhoea or vomiting, or both.

Where does the virus come from ?

These viruses infect only humans. They occur worldwide, and are often associated with large outbreaks in the community as well as outbreaks in care establishments e.g. care homes and hospitals. Noroviruses account for more than half of all reported gastroenteritis outbreaks every year.

How does the virus spread ?

The infection is most commonly spread from person to person but can also be contracted if the environment or food is contaminated with the virus. Person-to-person spread can occur by the faecal-oral route. Hands, clothing or surfaces which are not protected or cleaned properly may become contaminated with infected faeces. If a person with contaminated hands touches their mouth or handles food, then the virus can enter the body and cause infection. Person-to-person spread can also occur by breathing in tiny droplets of fluid when an infected person has been sick. Any food can become contaminated and if eaten can cause illness. Spread from contaminated to non-contaminated food can also occur. Outbreaks have sometimes been attributed to eating raw or partially cooked shellfish.

Infection can spread from person to person during the acute stage of the disease and up to 48 hours after diarrhoea ceases.

What are the symptoms ?

Symptoms normally develop 24-48 hours after exposure to the virus and usually resolve within 48 hours.

These may include :

- Nausea*
- Abdominal pain*
- Vomiting*
- Diarrhoea*
- Headache*
- Mild fever*

Testing for the infection

If you have diarrhoea, samples of stool should be submitted to your General Practitioner (GP) as soon as possible for testing.

Can I prevent the infection ?

This is a highly infectious disease and often it is extremely difficult to avoid, however you can reduce the risk of contracting or spreading Norovirus by regular, meticulous hand washing :

Before :

- Food handling and cooking*
- Eating*
- Feeding young children, the elderly or ill individuals*

and After :

- Using the toilet*
- Changing nappies*
- Attending to a person with diarrhoea or vomiting*

Avoid swimming pools for 2 weeks after diarrhoea has ceased.

How can I clean the environment ?

- If the environment is contaminated with diarrhoea or vomit, remove the material wearing disposable apron and gloves (where possible).*
- Dispose of the infected material hygienically either into a sluice, if in a care establishment, or down a lavatory if in a domestic setting.*
- Wash the area with detergent and hot water. Hard surfaces only should be wiped with a bleach solution.*
- Rinse the area and allow to dry (leave a window open or use extractor fan).*
- Remember to disinfect lavatories, including the handle of the cistern, after diarrhoeal or vomiting events.*
- Do not hand-wash visibly soiled clothing or bedding as tiny droplets of water which contain virus can be dispersed in the air and inhaled. Contaminated laundry should be pre-washed in a washing machine, then washed at the highest temperature tolerated by the fabric. A full wash at 60°C will kill the virus.*
- Bleach (chlorine) is a very effective disinfectant against these viruses, although other types of disinfectants may be advised.*

Do not handle or prepare food for other people while you have symptoms of vomiting or diarrhoea and for 48 hours after your symptoms stop.

Special measures during outbreaks in care homes and hospitals.

Advice for staff

- Report outbreaks of diarrhoea and vomiting immediately to the Public Health Protection Unit at Greater Glasgow & Clyde NHS Board.
- Isolate patients/residents with symptoms.
- Stop admissions and transfers of patients to and from the affected ward/unit (discuss with your local Infection Control Team or Public Health Protection Unit).
- If you have symptoms then refrain from work until 48 hours after symptoms cease.
- Never wear uniforms outwith the workplace.
- Encourage infected patients/residents to drink plenty of fluids to replace loss due to vomiting and diarrhoea.

Perform hand washing after contact with a patient/resident or the patient/resident's immediate environment.

Advice for visitors

- Don't visit care homes/hospitals if you have diarrhoea or vomiting.
- During outbreaks of Norovirus in care homes/hospitals keep visits to an essential minimum and don't visit other residents/patients in the care home/hospital.
- Don't take children under 5 years of age to the care home/hospital during an outbreak.
- Remember to wash your hands regularly.

Norovirus

PATIENT INFORMATION

If you suspect you have contracted Norovirus or would simply like more information, contact your General Practitioner (GP) or the Public Health Protection Unit at Greater Glasgow & Clyde NHS Board.

Tel : 0141-201-4917

