



## Norovirus Infection

### **What is norovirus infection?**

Norovirus infection is caused by a group of virus germs called noroviruses. Norovirus infection used to be called “Norwalk Virus.” The virus was named following an outbreak of the illness in a school in Norwalk, Ohio in 1968. Noroviruses can cause the “stomach flu” or gastroenteritis, and food borne illness.

### **What are the symptoms of a norovirus infection?**

The symptoms of a norovirus infection usually include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea and stomach cramping. A person may also have a low-grade fever, chills, headache, muscle aches, and a general sense of tiredness. The illness is usually short, with symptoms lasting only about one or two days. In general, children have more vomiting than adults. Most people with norovirus infection have more than one of these symptoms.

### **How soon will symptoms develop?**

People who are infected by the virus usually feel very sick, very quickly. Symptoms of norovirus infection usually begin about 24 to 48 hours after the virus enters the body, but they can appear as early as 12 hours after exposure.

### **How do people become infected with noroviruses?**

Noroviruses are found in the stool or vomit of infected people. People may become infected by:

- Eating food or drinking liquids that are contaminated with norovirus.
- Touching surfaces or objects contaminated with norovirus, then putting their hand in their mouth.
- Having direct contact with another person who is infected and showing symptoms (for example, when caring for someone with the illness, or sharing foods or eating utensils with someone who is sick).
- Breathing in the vicinity of someone who recently vomited.

### **Is it spread from person to person?**

Yes. Norovirus infections are very contagious (illness can be spread quickly from person to person). People are contagious from the moment they start feeling sick until about three days after recovery.

### **How are norovirus infections treated?**

There is no medication to treat norovirus infections. People with loose stools and vomiting should drink lots of fluids to prevent dehydration. Water, juice and other oral rehydration fluids should be used to prevent dehydration. An oral rehydration solution can be made adding one-half teaspoon of salt, one-half teaspoon of baking soda, and four tablespoons of sugar to one liter of water. Sports drinks like Gatorade or Powerade do not replace the fluids and minerals lost during illness, but may be sufficient in otherwise healthy people with diarrhea and without dehydration.

### **When can I return to work or school?**

Since the virus is passed in vomit and stool, children should remain home from childcare or school for 24 hours after experiencing vomiting or diarrhea. When children return to childcare and school, handwashing must be strictly monitored. Persons who work in nursing homes, take care of patients, or handle food should stay out of work while they are sick and for at least two days after symptoms end.

### **Can norovirus infections be prevented?**

Yes. To lower the risk of becoming infected with a norovirus, a person should:

- Frequently wash his hands, especially after toilet visits and changing diapers (this is very important when the child has frequent loose stools) and before eating or preparing food.
- Do not prepare food while sick, and for three days after recovery. Food that has been handled by a person with a norovirus infection should be thrown out.
- Clean and disinfect contaminated surfaces immediately after an episode of illness by using a bleach-based household cleaner or bleach-water solution of 2/3 cup bleach per one gallon of water.
- Immediately remove and wash clothing or linens that may be infected with the virus after an episode of illness (use hot water and soap).
- Flush any vomit or stool in the toilet and make sure that the bathroom is kept clean.

Free language assistance is available upon request.

For more information on norovirus infection, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) or call the Guilford County Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Division at 336-641-7777.