

Patient Information

Norovirus (Viral gastroenteritis)

What are Noroviruses?

Noroviruses are a group of viruses that are the most common cause of gastroenteritis (stomach bugs) in England and Wales. In the past, noroviruses have also been called 'winter vomiting viruses', 'small round structured viruses' or 'Norwalk-like viruses'.

How does it spread?

The virus is easily transmitted from one person to another. It can be transmitted by contact with an infected person; there is a risk of infection from patients who are vomiting; by consuming contaminated food or water or by contact with contaminated surfaces or objects.

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms of norovirus infection will begin around 12 to 48 hours after becoming infected. The illness will clear up on its own and the symptoms can last for 12 to 60 hours. They typically start with the sudden onset of nausea followed by projectile vomiting, and watery diarrhoea. Some people may have a raised temperature, headaches and aching limbs. Most people make a full recovery within one to two days, however some people (usually the very young or elderly) may become very dehydrated and need hospital treatment.

How common is norovirus?

Norovirus is not a notifiable disease so reporting is done on a voluntary basis. The Health Protection Agency (HPA) only receives reports of outbreaks and they see between 50 and 450 outbreaks each year. It is estimated that norovirus affects between 600,000 and a million people in the UK each year.

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.

Healthcare settings tend to be particularly affected by outbreaks of norovirus.

A recent study done by the Health Protection Agency shows that outbreaks are shortened when special measures are taken in hospitals, such as closing wards to new admissions and using strict hygiene measures.

Why does norovirus often cause outbreaks?

Norovirus often causes outbreaks because it is easily spread from person to person and the virus is able to survive in the environment for many days. Outbreaks usually affect people who are in semi-closed environments such as hospitals, nursing homes, schools and on cruise ships.

How can these outbreaks be stopped?

Outbreaks can be difficult to control and long-lasting because norovirus is easily passed from one person to another and the virus can survive in the environment.

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The best way to respond to an outbreak is to thoroughly clean contaminated areas and to encourage good hand washing using soap and water - not alcohol gel as this is not effective, and to seek advice on food handling. Those infected may be isolated for up to 48 hours after their symptoms have ceased, staff and patient movement may be restricted in order to limit the spread of infection.

What Healthcare staff do to prevent infection

- Good hand hygiene before and after contact with patients with soap and water.
- Contact infection control team if two or more patients are suffering with vomiting and/or diarrhoea.
- Nurse symptomatic patients in the same bay.
- Wearing apron and gloves when in close contact with affected patients.
- Staff who are affected should also inform occupational health and remain off work until 48 hours free of symptoms.
- Thorough cleaning of the affected area will minimise transmission.

What can you do to prevent infection during an outbreak of Norovirus?

- Do not visit an affected ward if your visit can wait.
- Do not visit the hospital if you have had gastroenteritis in the past 48hrs.
- Wash your hands with soap and water on entering and exiting a ward.
- Staff may also obtain further guidance in the trust Infection Control Policy folder which is available on each ward.

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.

Are there any long term effects?

There are no long-term effects from norovirus.

Further information or questions

If you have any queries please discuss with the nursing or medical staff or alternatively you may contact the Infection Prevention and Control Team via the infection control secretaries based at:

Conquest Hospital

The Ridge
St. Leonards-on-Sea
East Sussex, TN37 7RD
Tel: (01424) 755255 ext: 7233

Eastbourne District General Hospital

Kings Drive
Eastbourne
East Sussex, BN21 2UD
Tel: (01323) 417400 ext: 4136

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Important information

The information in this leaflet is for guidance purposes only and is not provided to replace professional clinical advice from a qualified practitioner.

Your comments

We are always interested to hear your views about our leaflets. If you have any comments please contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) – details below.

Hand hygiene

The Trust is committed to maintaining a clean, safe environment. Hand hygiene is very important in controlling infection. Alcohol gel is widely available at the patient bedside for staff use and at the entrance of each clinical area for visitors to clean their hands before and after entering.

Other formats

This information is available in alternative formats such as large print or electronically on request. Interpreters can also be booked. Please contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) offices, found in the main reception areas:

Conquest Hospital

Email: palsh@esht.nhs.uk - Telephone: **01424 758090**

Eastbourne District General Hospital

Email: palse@esht.nhs.uk - Telephone: **01323 435886**

After reading this information are there any questions you would like to ask? Please list below and ask your nurse or doctor.

Reference

The following clinicians have been consulted and agreed this patient information: The Infection Control Team

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Responsible clinicians: Tina Lloyd, Senior Infection Control Nurse