

Fact sheet

NOROVIRUS

Norovirus is a very common virus that causes diarrhea and vomiting in humans. The virus is very small, often difficult to detect and it only takes a few of them to cause illness. Norovirus is commonly responsible for outbreaks in places where people are in close proximity to each other (nursing homes, homes for the aged, banquets, cruise ships, swimming pools, childcare centers, schools and restaurants).

SYMPTOMS

Symptoms usually have a sudden onset and include watery, non-bloody diarrhea, vomiting, abdominal cramps and nausea. A low-grade fever may occur and dehydration is possible. The illness usually lasts 24 to 48 hours; however, the Norovirus can still be spread for 48 hours or longer after symptoms stop.

Symptoms usually appear 24 - 48 hours after exposure to the virus.

Recovery is usually complete with no serious long-term complications. Immunity against the virus is unclear and short.

The incidence of illness is higher in the fall and winter.

HOW IT IS SPREAD

Norovirus is transmitted from person to person or can be transmitted through food.

Noroviruses are very contagious. Transmission is 'fecal-oral'—virus from an ill person is ingested by another person in one of the following ways:

- Direct contact
- Eating food contaminated by the ill or recently ill person
- Touching objects contaminated by an ill or recently ill person and then transferring the virus to your mouth
- Being in an area where an ill person has recently vomited or flushed a toilet (contamination of these environments can be extensive)

TREATMENT

Infected individuals usually recover in 2 to 3 days. No specific treatment is available, but individuals should get plenty of rest and need to replace lost fluids by drinking liquids. Individuals who are severely dehydrated should seek medical attention.

PREVENTION

Thorough hand washing is the best prevention against Norovirus. Make sure hands are properly washed after using the toilet, changing diapers and before preparing food.



People ill with diarrhea and other Norovirus symptoms should stay away from others.

Carefully dispose of feces, and any material contaminated with feces and/or vomit.

Clean and sanitize washrooms and all hand contact surfaces once daily or as often as needed.

Encourage visitors to long term care institutions or hospitals to wash their hands before and after visiting the resident or patient.