

Norovirus Fact Sheet

Norovirus is a common and very contagious virus that causes vomiting and diarrhea

Norovirus is the leading cause of gastroenteritis and foodborne illness in the United States. It can infect people of all ages. Norovirus can occur at any time of year, but it is most common in the winter.

Norovirus is spread very easily and quickly in different ways

Norovirus is present in the stool or vomit of infected persons. You can get norovirus through direct contact with someone with norovirus, by eating foods or drinking liquids that are contaminated with norovirus, or by touching contaminated surfaces or objects and then touching your mouth before washing your hands. Outbreaks of norovirus are common in schools and childcare settings, healthcare facilities, and other settings where people are in close contact.

Symptoms of norovirus include:

- Nausea and vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Stomach pain
- Fever
- Headache, muscle aches, chills
- Tiredness

Symptoms usually appear 12 to 48 hours after being exposed to norovirus. You usually start to feel better in 1 to 3 days, though you can still spread the virus for a few days after that.

There is no specific treatment for norovirus

There are no specific antiviral medications to treat people with norovirus. If you are sick, you should rest and drink plenty of fluids without caffeine or alcohol to replace the fluids lost from vomiting and diarrhea. Over-the-counter oral rehydration fluids may help replace important nutrients and minerals, and reduce symptoms caused by mild dehydration.

Talk to your healthcare provider if your symptoms are severe

Excessive vomiting and diarrhea can lead to severe dehydration and other serious complications, which may need to be addressed in a healthcare setting. Children younger than 5 years old, older adults, and people with weakened immune systems are more likely to develop severe infections. Talk to your doctor if you or someone you're caring for has severe symptoms.

Handwashing and cleaning are the most effective ways to prevent norovirus

Wash your hands (and help young children wash their hands) with soap and water for at least 20 seconds:

- After having diarrhea or vomiting
- After using the toilet
- After changing diapers
- After touching any stool-soiled or vomit-soiled materials, toilets, or surfaces
- After cleaning up vomit or diarrhea
- Before handling food or drink

Thoroughly clean and disinfect commonly touched surfaces with a bleach-based household cleaner regularly until after your symptoms have gone away. In addition to regular cleaning, immediately clean bathrooms or other areas where episodes of vomiting or diarrhea have occurred with a bleach-based cleaner.

Food safety and norovirus

Food can become contaminated with norovirus during the harvest, preparation, or serving processes. To reduce your risk of getting norovirus from food, you should wash and cook your food thoroughly. However, even food that has been washed and cooked appropriately can become contaminated if a person with norovirus has not washed their hands well enough before handling the food, food containers, or utensils.

In addition to contamination that can happen during or after the harvest process, oysters and other filter-feeding shellfish can become contaminated with norovirus and other viruses and bacteria in their natural environment. To avoid getting norovirus and other illnesses, don't eat raw or undercooked shellfish.