

FACTSHEET 11 – Norovirus & Other Viruses

August 2016

What Is Norovirus?

It is the most common cause of gastroenteritis (stomach bugs) also called “winter vomiting virus” or “Norwalk-like virus”. It is estimated that Norovirus affects between six hundred thousand and a million people in the UK each year, most of these are people in their own homes. This virus is responsible for causing outbreaks of gastroenteritis in institutions like hospitals, residential/nursing homes, schools and cruise ships.

What Is Viral Gastroenteritis?

It is an infection of the gut (intestines) which usually causes vomiting and/or diarrhoea. It is most commonly caused by Norovirus, other small round structured viruses or Rotavirus.

What Are The Symptoms?

The following symptoms will usually begin around twelve to seventy two hours after becoming infected with Gastroenteritis/Norovirus:

- sudden onset of nausea followed by vomiting – which may be projectile;
- watery diarrhoea;
- stomach pains/cramps;
- some people may have a raised temperature, headache and aching limbs;

How Long Do The Symptoms Last?

Symptoms may last twelve to seventy two hours. Most people will make a full recovery within two days. The very young, elderly, or people with a weakened immune system may become dehydrated and require hospital treatment.

How Is Viral Gastroenteritis Including Norovirus Caught?

Viral gastroenteritis is easily transmitted from one person to another:

- by contact with an infected person;
- by contact with surfaces or objects that have been contaminated with viral particles;
- by swallowing the virus dispersed in the air after someone has had projectile vomiting;
- by consuming food or water contaminated with viral particles;
- also, rarely, from raw or undercooked food, particularly shellfish, as this may be contaminated by raw sewage.

Why Does Norovirus Often Cause Outbreaks?

It is easily spread from one person to another and the virus is able to survive in the environment for many days. More than 50% of people who are exposed to Norovirus will be affected.

There are many different strains and once infected, immunity is short lived.

Who Is At Risk Of Getting Norovirus Or Other Viral Gastroenteritis?

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.

Outbreaks usually affect people who are in semi closed environments, or where large numbers of people congregate for several days, providing an ideal environment for the spread of the disease.

How Is Norovirus And Other Viral Gastroenteritis Treated?

There is no specific treatment, apart from letting the illness run its course. It is important to drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration. This is particularly important for young children and the elderly.

If I Am Suffering From Norovirus Or Other Viral Gastroenteritis, How Can I Prevent Others From Becoming Infected?

- Good hygiene is important in preventing others from becoming infected. This includes thorough hand washing with soap and water before and after contact with others and after using the toilet.
- Soap and water is more effective against the viruses than alcohol gel when cleaning your hands.
- Food preparation should be avoided until 48 hours after symptoms have gone altogether.

Do You Need To Stay Off Work Or School?

Yes. While you are ill and have symptoms you are infectious. You can return to work or school/nursery once you have been free from symptoms for 48 hours.