



Food safety advice

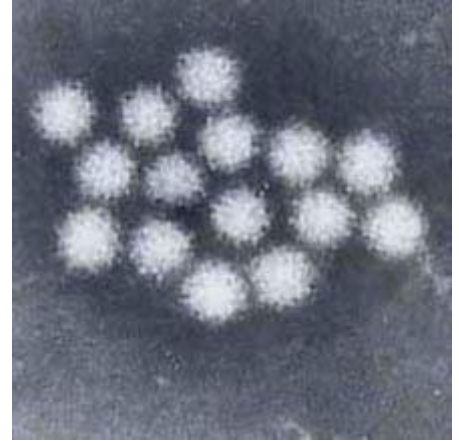
Viral Gastroenteritis/Norovirus

The Germ

There are a number of different viruses which can cause vomiting and/or diarrhoea and give gastroenteritis or "food poisoning like symptoms", these include Norovirus, Adenoviruses and Rotaviruses.

The Illness

Norovirus is also known as the Winter Vomiting Bug. It is the most common stomach bug in the UK, affecting people of all ages, with the number of individual cases and outbreaks peaking over the winter months.



The virus is highly contagious and causes vomiting and /or [diarrhoea](#). As there is no specific cure, you have to let it run its course, but it should not last more than a couple of days. If you are unwell make sure you drink plenty of fluids to avoid [dehydration](#) and practice good hygiene to help prevent it from spreading to your family and to others.

Norovirus can be unpleasant to experience, but it is not generally dangerous and most people make a full recovery within a couple of days, without having to see a doctor.

The Main Symptoms

The symptoms are diarrhoea and/or vomiting which is often severe and projectile, nausea and sometimes fever. The onset time is usually 12 – 48 hours after contact with an infected person or environment. The symptoms usually last a day or two but people often describe being washed out and achy for longer however most people are well again within a couple of days.

Diagnosis

GP's rarely request a stool specimen to make a clinical diagnosis; rather the range of symptoms and pattern of onsets through a family or establishment suggests that a patient's illness is caused by a virus rather than food poisoning. Accurate diagnosis of viruses has, until recently been difficult due to their very small size, however in some outbreak situations stool specimens may be requested and these may be pooled together for clinical examination leading to a confirmed diagnosis of Norovirus.



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Spread of the illness

Direct person to person spread readily occurs and vomit and diarrhoea from an infected person carry large numbers of viral particles. Outbreaks in residential homes, schools or any place where people are together in large groups can lead to a high rate of infection due to contamination of surfaces in the environment and air borne infection. Very occasionally we have seen outbreaks of viral illness associated with a specific food but this is unusual compared with infection from a broad environmental spread.

Treatment

Most people recover fairly quickly within a couple of days, however if you are worried or your symptoms continue please contact NHS Direct on 111 or visit www.nhs.uk or call your GP Practice for further advice.

Prevention of Spread

If possible stay at home and don't go to the doctor, because norovirus is contagious and there is nothing the doctor can do while you have it.

Stay at home to avoid passing on the infection to others, and stay off school or work for 48 hours after the last episode of diarrhoea or vomiting. If your symptoms last for more than a few days contact your GP surgery for further advice.

Any food handler, clinical, dental or medical worker, persons working with elderly or the young who with symptoms must stay away from work until they have been well for 48 hours.

If someone is sick cover the vomit and clean up contaminated areas immediately. Clean area thoroughly with a suitable anti viral / anti bacterial disinfectant cleaner and disposable paper towels, seal it all in a bag, throw away then wash your hands!

In the home strict personal hygiene practices should be followed.

- Wash toilet and bathroom surfaces including all door handles, taps, switches, and flush handles with hot soapy water. Dry all surfaces thoroughly then disinfect with an anti bacterial /anti viral disinfectant cleaning spray.
- Do not share flannels, sponges and towels.
- Infected persons should be isolated as much as possible and should not prepare or handle food.
- Any soiled materials or soft furnishings need to be washed in a hot wash or cleaned with suitable anti viral cleaner as above.

Keep any child suffering from vomiting or diarrhoea off school, playgroup, nursery and swimming until 48 hours after they are completely well.