

Fact Sheet

Norovirus

What is Norovirus?



Norovirus is the most common cause of acute gastroenteritis in the United States. Each year, it causes 19-21 million illnesses and contributes to 56,000-71,000 hospitalizations and 570-800 deaths. Norovirus is also the most common cause of foodborne-disease outbreaks in the United States.

How is it Spread?

Norovirus is a highly contagious virus. Anyone can get infected with norovirus and get sick. Also, a person can get norovirus illness many times in their life. One reason for this is that there are many different types of noroviruses. Being infected with one type of norovirus may not protect a person against other types.

A person is most contagious:

- § When sick with norovirus illness
- § During the first few days after recovering from norovirus illness

A person can become infected with norovirus by accidentally getting stool or vomit from infected people in the mouth. This usually happens by:

- § Eating food or drinking liquids that are contaminated with norovirus
- § Touching surfaces or objects contaminated with norovirus then putting fingers in mouth
- § Having contact with someone who is infected with norovirus (for example, caring for or sharing food or eating utensils with someone with norovirus illness)

Norovirus can be found in the stool (feces) even before feeling sick. The virus can stay in the stool for 2 weeks or more after a person is feeling better.

Norovirus can spread quickly in closed places like daycare centers, nursing homes, schools, and cruise ships. Most norovirus outbreaks happen from November to April in the United States.

Signs and Symptoms

Signs and symptoms of norovirus infection include:

- § Nausea
- § Vomiting
- § Abdominal pain or cramps
- § Watery or loose diarrhea
- § Malaise
- § Low-grade fever
- § Muscle pain

Signs and symptoms usually begin 24 to 48 hours after first exposure to the virus, and last one to three days. A person may continue to shed virus in the feces for up to three days after recovery.

Some people with norovirus infection may show no signs or symptoms. However, they are still contagious and can spread the virus to others.

Seek medical attention if diarrhea doesn't go away within several days. Also call a doctor if experiencing severe vomiting, bloody stools, abdominal pain or dehydration.

Diagnosis

Diagnosis is usually based on symptoms. But norovirus can be identified by testing a stool sample. If a person is immunocompromised or has other health problems, a doctor may recommend a stool test to confirm the presence of norovirus.

Treatment

There is no specific medicine to treat people with norovirus illness. Norovirus infection cannot be treated with antibiotics because it is a viral (not a bacterial) infection.

A person infected with the norovirus illness should drink plenty of liquids to replace fluid lost from throwing up and diarrhea. This will help prevent dehydration.

Sports drinks and other drinks without caffeine or alcohol can help with mild dehydration. But, these drinks may not replace important nutrients and minerals. Oral rehydration fluids that can be purchased over the counter are most helpful for mild dehydration.

Complications

For most people, norovirus infection clears up within a few days and isn't life-threatening. But in some people — especially children and older immunocompromised adults in hospitals or nursing homes — norovirus infection can cause severe dehydration, malnutrition and even death.

Dehydration can lead to serious problems. Severe dehydration may require hospitalization for treatment with fluids given through the vein (intravenous or IV fluids). If an individual is severely dehydrated, call a doctor.

The best way to help prevent norovirus is to practice proper hand washing and general cleanliness.

Warning signs of dehydration include:

- § Fatigue
- § Dry mouth and throat
- § Listlessness
- § Dizziness
- § Decreased urine output

Prevention

To protect from norovirus:

- § Wash hands often.
- § Cook shellfish to 140 degrees Fahrenheit or higher.
- § When sick, don't prepare food or care for others.
- § Rinse fruits and vegetables thoroughly.
- § After vomiting or having diarrhea, immediately clean and disinfect surfaces and wash soiled laundry.



For more sources of information on this topic visit:

ST. CLAIR COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT www.scchealth.co

MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES www.michigan.gov/mdhhs

CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION www.cdc.gov

THE MAYO CLINIC www.mayoclinic.org