

Norovirus General Information

What are noroviruses?

The term “norovirus” is the official name for a group of viruses that cause gastroenteritis. They are also called caliciviruses (because they belong to the virus family *Caliciviridae*). They used to be called Norwalk-like viruses (NLVs).

Norovirus illnesses are common and affect all age groups. They can occur anytime but are more common in the winter months.

What are the symptoms?

Noroviruses cause gastroenteritis, an irritation of the stomach and intestines. The most common symptoms are:

- nausea
- vomiting
- diarrhea
- stomach cramps

Sometimes there is a low-grade fever, chills, headache, muscle aches, and fatigue. Norovirus illness usually begins suddenly and lasts 1 to 3 days.

How is it spread?

Noroviruses are spread mainly through contact with the vomit or feces of an infected person. This happens because:

- The virus can spread easily from person to person on unwashed hands.
- The virus can also spread through food, water, or ice that has been handled by a sick person.
- Vomiting may spread the virus short distances through the air.
- The virus can survive on surfaces such as door handles, countertops or sink taps for a long time.

You can get a norovirus illness while caring for someone who is infected with it.

Noroviruses spread easily in places where people are in close contact – for example, schools, child care centres, long-term care facilities, health care facilities and cruise ships.

It is important to wash hands carefully even after symptoms stop.

How is norovirus treated?

There are no medications to treat this infection.

Drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration. See a doctor if vomiting or diarrhea lasts for more than 2 to 3 days.

Healthy people usually recover on their own in about 48 hours.

What should I do if someone in my family is vomiting and has diarrhea?

- Anyone who is vomiting and has diarrhea should stay home from work, school or child care.
- Food handlers and health care workers should not return to work until 48 hours after diarrhea and vomiting have stopped.
- Wash hands often, especially after using the bathroom or changing diapers and before eating or preparing food.
- Thoroughly clean floors, counters, and bathrooms. Pay extra attention to surfaces that are often touched.
- Don't share glasses or dishes.
- Use separate towels for sick family members.

Handwashing tips

- Wet your hands with warm running water.
- Add soap and scrub for at least 15 seconds. Wash all parts of your hands – the backs, between fingers, thumbs and under the nails.
- Rinse off soap under running water for 5 to 10 seconds.
- Dry your hands with a towel. Pat them dry. Do not rub.
- Turn off the tap with a towel.

How should I clean if someone is vomiting and has diarrhea?

You can wear dishwashing or disposable gloves for cleaning, but they are not necessary. Do not use these gloves for anything else other than cleaning. Throw them away once you have finished. Use a new pair of gloves for each clean-up.

To clean up vomit and feces:

- Use paper towels to soak up liquids and remove solid material. Throw away the paper towels in a garbage bag.

- Clean the soiled area with detergent and water. Do not use the cloth or sponge for other areas of the house as this might spread the virus. Use separate cloths for the sink and for the toilet. Use cleaning cloths and sponges only once. Throw them away after you use them.
- Disinfect the area with a household cleaner that contains bleach or make your own bleach solution by mixing 1 part bleach with 50 parts water [20 ml of bleach to 980 ml of water]. Make this solution fresh each time you need it. Make sure the disinfectant is safe for the surface being cleaned. Do not use bleach on carpets or fabrics.
- Allow the area to air-dry.
- Wash your hands after cleaning, even if you wore gloves.

Do not vacuum vomit or feces from carpets. Clean as above and, if possible, follow up with steam cleaning before vacuuming.

To clean soiled laundry:

- Remove any solid material with paper towels or a gloved hand. Do not shake out soiled sheets or clothes.
- Wash bedding and clothing that is soiled or has been used by a sick family member with the regular laundry.
- Use regular laundry detergent.
- Wash in hot water.
- Dry using as hot a setting as possible.
- Wash your hands after handling soiled laundry.

For more information

For more information on noroviruses, see:

- The Public Health Agency of Canada's Norovirus Fact Sheet: phac-aspc.gc.ca/fs-sa/fs-fi/norovirus-eng.php
- Nova Scotia Norovirus Fact Sheet: novascotia.ca/dhw/environmental/documents/Norovirus-Factsheet.pdf

For more information on proper handwashing, visit:

- hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/iyh-vsv/diseases-maladies/hands-mains-eng.php#the
- caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/handwashing