

# Norovirus

What you need to know



## Information for patients

Infection Prevention and Control



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## **What is Norovirus?**

Norovirus (viral gastroenteritis) is a frequent cause of diarrhoea and vomiting in the community, especially during the winter. It is sometimes called winter vomiting disease. It is the most common stomach bug in the UK, affecting people of all ages. It spreads easily by contact with contaminated surfaces, contact with an infected person or by eating or drinking contaminated food or water.

## **Why is it a problem?**

Norovirus causes symptoms of 'gastric flu'. It lasts 2-3 days and the person will have watery diarrhoea and/or vomiting. Some people may have a raised temperature, headaches and aching limbs. The illness is often mild in nature and usually gets better without intervention. However, Norovirus does spread very easily in closed settings such as in hospitals, nursing homes and cruise ships, probably due to symptoms of vomiting causing environmental contamination. Large numbers of patients and staff can be involved and it is important to stop the illness from spreading around the hospital or to relatives.

## **How does it affect me?**

If you are admitted with symptoms of Norovirus or become unwell on the ward, your movement will be restricted until your symptoms have settled. Alternatively you may be moved to a side room or to an area with other patients with the same illness. Your transfer to another ward or a care home may be delayed until the illness is over. You should have as few visitors as possible and they will need to clean their hands before and after seeing you on the ward.

## **Will I need treatment?**

Antibiotics are of no value in the treatment of Norovirus. If you develop diarrhoea and/or vomiting you will need to make sure you drink plenty of fluid. A faecal sample will be sent to the laboratory for testing. Once the illness is over, usually 72 hours after the last symptoms, no further action is necessary.

## **Can I have visitors?**

We give the following advice regarding visitors:

- It is advisable for children not to visit while you have diarrhoea
- It is also advisable to keep the number of visitors to a minimum as they may pick up the virus when they are on the ward.
- Friends or relatives that are unwell or suffering from diarrhoea and/or vomiting themselves must not visit until they have been free of symptoms for at least 48 hours. If friends or relatives have had contact with someone else who is unwell or suffering from diarrhoea and/or vomiting, they should not visit for at least 48 hours after that contact. If you have any concerns at all about someone visiting please discuss this with a doctor or a nurse.
- To prevent the spread of infection your visitors should avoid visiting other wards or patients.
- Visitors do not need to wear gloves or an apron unless they are helping directly with your personal care.
- Visitors must wash their hands thoroughly with soap and water before and after visiting you - see below.
- Visitors should not eat or drink whilst on the ward
- The nursing staff will advise if anything further is necessary.

## Good hand hygiene

- Good hand hygiene is important to stop the spread of Norovirus.
- People are advised to
  - wet hands, wash them thoroughly using soap and water, rinse and dry them thoroughly as shown below.
  - wash their hands especially before and after visiting, after using the toilet, before preparing food and before eating.
  - not rely on use of alcohol gels as these do not kill Norovirus



## What should I do with my laundry?

- Soiled laundry should be double bagged by the nursing staff before being taken home.
- Laundry should be washed separately on a hot detergent wash.
- Household gloves should be worn for handling soiled linen. After handling soiled linen, the outside of the gloves should be washed.
- Wash your hands with soap and water following contact with any soiled clothing and after removing household gloves.

## Who can I contact if I have any questions?

The doctors and nurses looking after you will be able to answer any questions you have.

The Infection Prevention and Control Team are also available to answer any queries you may have.

## Where can I find more information?

Further information about Norovirus infection is available via the Public Health England website:

**<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/public-health-england>**

The Infection Prevention and Control Team can be contacted directly on:

- **0114 271 4569** (Northern General Hospital)
- **0114 271 3120** (Royal Hallamshire Hospital, Weston Park, Jessop Wing)

And you can visit **[www.sth.nhs.uk/patients](http://www.sth.nhs.uk/patients)**

If relatives / visitors are concerned about having Norovirus please ask them to contact NHS 111 or look for advice online at: **[www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)**  
This includes an online symptom checker.

Public Health England advises people with symptoms of Norovirus not to visit either A&E or a GP as this may spread the virus.





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