

PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET

Norovirus



Burlington County Health Department

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Public Health
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Burlington County Health Department
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What is Norovirus?

Norovirus is a very contagious virus that infected the stomach or intestines. It is sometimes called the stomach flu or bug. Food poisoning can be caused by noroviruses, but other germs and chemicals can also cause food poisoning.

You can get norovirus from an infected person, contaminated food or water, or by touching contaminated surfaces.

What are the symptoms caused by Norovirus?

Norovirus causes inflammation (swelling) of the stomach or intestines or both. This is called acute gastroenteritis. The most common symptoms are: diarrhea, throwing up, nausea, and stomach pain. Other symptoms may include: fever, headache, or body aches.

A person usually develops symptoms 12 to 48 hours after being exposed to norovirus. Most people feel better within 1 to 3 days. Some may feel extremely ill and throw up or have diarrhea many times a day. This can lead to dehydration, especially in young children, older adults, and people with other illnesses.

Symptoms of dehydration are: decrease in urination, dry mouth and throat, and feeling dizzy when standing up. Prevent dehydration by drinking plenty of fluids, avoiding drinks with alcohol or caffeine. Over the counter oral rehydration fluids can be helpful. Contact your primary care provider if severe dehydration is suspected.

How is norovirus spread?

Norovirus is very contagious and is easily spread from person to person. The virus is found in the feces and vomit of infected people. People can become infected in several ways including:

- Eating food or drinking liquids that are contaminated
- Touching contaminated surfaces or objects then touching your mouth before washing your hands
- Having direct contact with another person who is infected and then touching your mouth before handwashing.

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

How long are people contagious?

Norovirus can be found in your feces even before you start feeling sick. The virus can stay in your stool for 2 weeks or more after you feel better. An infected person is most contagious:

- When they are sick with norovirus illness, and
- During the first few days after they recover from norovirus illness.

Therefore, good hand washing is important. People infected with norovirus should not prepare food while they have symptoms and for 3 days after they recover.

What treatment is available for norovirus?

Currently, there is no specific medication or vaccine for norovirus. Norovirus cannot be treated with antibiotics because it is a viral infection, not bacteria. By drinking fluids, such as water and avoiding drinks with alcohol or caffeine, people can reduce their chance of becoming dehydrated.

Infected people should stay home and away from others and avoid preparing food.

Do infected people need to be excluded from school, work, or daycare?

Since the virus is passed in vomit and feces, children should not go to daycare or school while they have diarrhea or vomiting. Children can return to daycare or school once symptoms are finished, but hand washing must be strictly monitored. People who work in nursing homes, take care of patients, or handle food should stay out of work until at least three days after symptoms end.

Can norovirus infections be prevented?

You can decrease your chance of coming in contact with noroviruses by:

- Practicing good hygiene. Wash hands often with soap and water, especially after using the toilet and changing diapers, and always before eating, preparing, or handling food.
- **Alcohol-based hand sanitizers are NOT effective against norovirus**
- Promptly disinfect contaminated surfaces with household chlorine bleach-based cleaners
- Wash soiled clothing and linens
- Avoiding food or water from sources that may be contaminated

Where can I get more information?

- Your primary care provider
- The Burlington County Health Department at (609)265-5548 or www.co.burlington.nj.us/health
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website at: <http://www.cdc.gov/norovirus>
- The New Jersey Department of Health <http://www.state.nj.us/health>