



## Norovirus (Stomach Flu)

### What are noroviruses?

Noroviruses are members of a group of viruses called caliciviruses also known previously as “Norwalk-like viruses.” Infection with norovirus affects the stomach and intestines, causing an illness called gastroenteritis, or “stomach flu.” This “stomach flu” is **not** related to the flu (or influenza), which is a respiratory illness caused by influenza virus. In addition, noroviruses are not related to bacteria and parasites that can cause gastrointestinal illnesses similar to norovirus infection. Viruses are much smaller, are not affected by treatment with antibiotics, and cannot grow outside a person’s body.

### Who gets norovirus infection?

Anyone can become infected with these viruses. There are many different strains of norovirus, which makes it difficult for a person’s body to develop long-lasting immunity. Norovirus illness can recur throughout a person’s lifetime. In addition, because of differences in genetic factors, some people are more likely to become infected and develop more severe illness than others.

### What are the symptoms of illness caused by noroviruses?

Nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and some stomach cramping. In general, children experience more vomiting than adults. Sometimes people have a low-grade fever, chills, headache, muscle aches, and a general sense of tiredness. The illness often begins suddenly, and the infected person may feel very sick. The illness is usually brief, with symptoms lasting only about 1 or 2 days.

### How serious is norovirus disease?

People may feel very sick and vomit many times a day, but most people will get better within 1 or 2 days without any long-term health effects. However, sometimes people are unable to drink enough liquids to replace the liquids they lose due to vomiting and diarrhea. As a result, they can become dehydrated and may need special medical attention.

### How is norovirus spread?

Noroviruses are very contagious and can spread easily from person to person. Both stool and vomit are infectious. Particular care should be taken when changing an infected baby’s diaper. Other ways people can become infected include:

- \*Eating or drinking norovirus-contaminated food or liquids
- \*Touching surfaces or objects contaminated with norovirus, and then placing hands in one’s mouth
- \*Having direct contact with another person who is infected and showing symptoms

### When do symptoms appear?

Symptoms of norovirus illness usually begin about 24 to 48 hours after ingestion of the virus, but they can appear as early as 12 hours after exposure.



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### How long are people contagious?

People infected with norovirus are contagious from the moment they begin feeling ill until at least 3 days after recovery. Some people may be contagious for as long as 2 weeks after recovery. Therefore, it is particularly important for people to use good hand washing and other hygienic practices after they have recently recovered from norovirus illness.

### What treatment is available for people with norovirus infection?

Currently, there is no antiviral medication that works against norovirus and there is no vaccine to prevent infection. Norovirus infection cannot be treated with antibiotics. This is because antibiotics work to fight bacteria and not viruses.

#### *For more information:*

Sedgwick County Health Department  
660-7555 or  
[www.sedgwickcounty.org](http://www.sedgwickcounty.org)

### Can norovirus be prevented?

You can decrease your chance of coming into contact with norovirus by following these preventive steps:

\*Frequently wash your hands, especially after toilet visits, changing diapers and before eating or preparing food.

\*Carefully wash fruits and vegetables. Steam oysters before eating them.

\*Thoroughly clean and disinfect contaminated surfaces immediately after an episode of illness by using a bleach-based household cleaner.

\*Immediately remove and wash clothing or linens that may be contaminated with viruses after an episode of illness. Use hot water and soap.

\*Routinely sanitize and keep your bathroom(s) clean.

\*Persons who are infected with norovirus should not prepare food while they have symptoms and for 3 days after they recover from their illness. Food that may have been contaminated by an ill person should be disposed of properly.