

Norovirus spreads quickly and easily from person to person. Every time you take care of someone experiencing vomiting or diarrhea you are possibly infecting yourself with the virus. It is very important to keep your hands germ-free with frequent and thorough hand washing.



Stopping the Spread of Norovirus

Norovirus is commonly known as the “stomach flu” and causes diarrhea and vomiting. The virus is passed from person to person and affects people of all ages. Most infections and outbreaks are seen during winter months.

Norovirus is easily spread in areas where there are large numbers of people together for several days or more. In long-term care centres, staff, residents and visitors can all be affected by it, which can cause disruptions in resident care and be very uncomfortable for those with the illness.

Symptoms will begin to show around 12 to 48 hours after becoming infected and may last from 12 to 60 hours. Norovirus often starts with the sudden onset of nausea, vomiting, watery diarrhea and stomach cramps. Some people may also have a high temperature, headaches and aching limbs. Most people make a full recovery in one to two days, however, some (usually the young and old) may become very dehydrated and require hospital treatment.

Antibiotics are not needed, or effective, in treating Norovirus. There is no specific treatment apart from letting the illness run its course. It is important to drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration.

Norovirus is passed on in an infected person’s vomit or diarrhea. Surfaces or objects used or touched by the infected person can become a mode of transmission as well. Norovirus can also be caught by consuming contaminated food or water.

Hand washing is the most important form of prevention, especially after using the bathroom and before eating. Wash hands by rubbing vigorously with soap and water for at least 15 to 20 seconds. Dry hands with paper towels and then use the paper towels to turn off the taps. Remind all staff performing resident care to clean their hands.

A resident with diarrhea will be on special precautions. Staff will wear gloves and gowns and must wash their hands before and after providing care. Signs will be posted to remind staff to take additional precautions to prevent the spread of infection.

How to visit during a Norovirus outbreak

- Visitors should report to the nurses’ station for guidance before entering a room with signs posted.
- Visitors must not access the kitchen area after they have been in a room with signs posted. Staff will help you if you need the kitchen facility.
- Food items from home should be single portions. Do not put food containers that have been in a room with signs posted in the fridge in the common kitchen.
- Visitors can access the kitchen to place items in the fridge if they have not yet entered a room with signs posted.
- Visitors should clean their hands before entering and upon leaving a resident’s room. Wash your hands with soap and water after providing any care.
- Visitors are to use public washrooms only, not resident washrooms.
- You should not visit anyone else in the facility after visiting a resident in a room with signs posted.
- As much as possible, do not visit if you are unwell; the risk of getting an infection is higher if you are sick.