

Information Leaflet on **Noroviruses**

- Avoid food preparation until 3 days after symptoms have ceased.

What can be done to prevent infection?

It is often impossible to prevent infection; however, taking good hygiene measures around someone who is infected can decrease your chances of getting infected.

- Frequent hand washing including before eating or preparing food.
- 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 virus after an episode of illness.
- Flush or discard any vomit and/or faeces in the toilet and make sure that the surrounding area is kept clean.

How is Norovirus treated?

There is no specific treatment for Norovirus apart from letting the illness run its course. It is important to drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration.

Please do not hesitate to ask the nursing and medical staff for more information on Noroviruses.

Infection Prevention and Control Team
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Beacon Hospital, Sandyford, Dublin 18
www.beaconhospital.ie



What are Noroviruses?



Noroviruses are a group of viruses that are the most common cause of gastroenteritis (stomach bugs) in Ireland. Noroviruses, have also been called, 'winter vomiting viruses', 'small round-structured viruses' or 'Norwalk-like-viruses'. They belong to a group of viruses called 'caliciviruses'.

How does Norovirus spread?

The virus is easily transmitted from one person to another. It can be transmitted by contact with an infected person; by consuming contaminated food or water or by contact with contaminated surfaces or objects.

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms of Norovirus infection will begin around 12 to 48 hours after becoming infected. The illness is self-limiting and the symptoms will last for 12-60 hours. They will start with:

- Nausea (often sudden onset)
- Vomiting (often projectile)
- Watery diarrhoea
- Some people have a rise in temperature, chills, muscle aches and headaches.

Most people make a full recovery within 1-2 days, however some people (usually the very young or elderly) may become very dehydrated and require hospital treatment.

How does Norovirus spread?

People can become infected with the virus in several ways, including:

- Contact with an infected person e.g. when caring for someone with Norovirus infection

- Contact with contaminated surfaces or objects and then touching their mouth or mucous membranes
- In hospitals, healthcare workers and hospital visitors can spread the virus to other patients or contaminate surfaces through hand contact
- Consuming contaminated food or water.

Why does Noroviruses often cause outbreaks?

Noroviruses often cause outbreaks because they are easily spread from one person to another. The faeces and vomit of an infected person contain the virus and are infectious. People infected with the virus are contagious from the moment they begin feeling ill to 2-3 days after recovery. Some people may be contagious for as long as 2 weeks after recovery.

The virus is able to survive in the environment for many days. Because there are many different strains of Norovirus and immunity is short lived, outbreaks tend to affect more than 50% of susceptible people. **Outbreaks usually tend to affect people in semi-closed environments such as schools, hospitals and nursing homes.**

How can these outbreaks be stopped?

Outbreaks can be difficult to control and long-lasting because Norovirus is easily transmitted from one person to another and the virus can survive in the environment. In hospitals the most effective way to respond to an outbreak is to:

- Isolate those who have been infected from non-infected patients for up to 48 hours after their symptoms have ceased
- Close wards to new admissions within 4 days of the beginning of the outbreak

- Disinfect contaminated areas.
- Implement good hygiene measures including strict hand hygiene measures.

Can family members and friends visit as normal?

- Persons visiting should be aware of their own health status so as to avoid either putting the patient at increased risk or themselves at risk.



- It is unwise to visit any patient if you are feeling unwell, for example, if you have gastroenteritis (vomiting/diarrhoea), or a flu-like illness
- Visitors who themselves may have a lower resistance to infection, e.g. having undergone treatment for cancer, are on antibiotic treatment or are awaiting major surgery in the near future, should seek the advice of their G.P. in order to evaluate if any risk exists
- The hospital can pose risks for young children, who may not have developed full immunity to germs outside their home.

If I'm suffering from Norovirus, how can I prevent others from becoming infected?

Good hygiene is important in preventing others from becoming infected. Other measure include:

- Staying at home until 48 hours after your symptoms have ceased
- Thorough and frequent hand washing