

What is Norovirus?

Noroviruses are a group of viruses that are the most common cause of gastroenteritis (stomach bugs causing diarrhoea and vomiting).

Who is at risk of getting Norovirus?

Norovirus can affect anyone even if you have had Norovirus in the past. Staff, patients and visitors can all be affected by Norovirus and this can be very disruptive for the running of a hospital, as well as being very uncomfortable for those who suffer from it.

How is it spread?

The virus is very easily spread from person to person. It can be transmitted by:

- contact with an infected person,
- eating contaminated food
- contact with contaminated surfaces or objects e.g. door handles, light switches.

Outbreaks can occur in places where many people are in close contact with each other, such as nursing homes, hospitals, schools, cruise ships and hotels.

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms will begin around 12 to 48 hours after becoming infected and will last for between 12 to 72 hours. It often starts with the sudden onset of nausea followed by vomiting and/or watery diarrhoea. Some people may have a raised temperature, headaches and aching limbs. Most people make a full recovery within 1-2 days, however some people (usually the very young or elderly) may become dehydrated and require hospital treatment.

How is a diagnosis made?

Diagnosis is normally made by sending a stool sample to the laboratory for testing.

How will I be treated and will it affect my treatment?

There is no specific treatment apart from letting the illness run its course. You will need to drink frequently to prevent dehydration. During an outbreak situation it may be necessary to restrict patient movement to prevent further spread of the infection.

If you require urgent investigations (scans, x-ray) you may still be able to attend but the risks will be assessed for each patient. If your investigation is not urgent you will have it after you have been symptom free for 72 hours.

How will I be looked after?

If you develop diarrhoea or vomiting please let the nurses know straight away. You may be moved to a side room. However if there is an outbreak on a ward due to the rapid spread of this illness, it may be necessary to take care of you on the ward with other affected patients. The staff will take precautions not to spread the virus by wearing gloves, aprons and washing their hands with soap and water. Hand sanitiser is **not** effective when dealing with diarrhoea and vomiting.

Good hand hygiene is **very important** to stop the spread of the virus. You should wash your hands with soap and water **before** you eat anything and **after** you go to the toilet.

All fruit and other food should be in a sealed container stored inside your locker.

Will I still be able to have visitors?

In outbreak situations it may be necessary to apply restricted visiting, if this is the case a notice will be displayed at the entrance to the ward and your visitors informed. Your visitors should check with the nurses before visiting. They will be asked to wash their hands with soap and water on entering and leaving the ward. If they help with your care they will need to wear gloves and aprons. If your visitors are affected they should not visit the hospital until they are symptom free for 48 hours.

What should I do if I am unwell after I go home?

If you develop diarrhoea or sickness after you go home it is important you drink frequently to prevent dehydration. This may prevent you being re-admitted to hospital unnecessarily. If your symptoms do not settle or you are feeling particularly unwell you may need to contact NHS Choices on 111 or your GP for further advice. It would be helpful, if you develop any diarrhoea or sickness within 2 or 3 days of being discharged, to let the ward know.