

# NOROVIRUS FAQs

## **What are noroviruses?**

Noroviruses are a group of viruses that are the most common cause of gastroenteritis. In the past, noroviruses have been called winter vomiting viruses, small round structured viruses or norowalk like viruses.

## **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 food or water or by contact with contaminated surfaces or objects.

## **What are the symptoms?**

The symptoms of norovirus will begin 12 to 48 hours after becoming infected. The illness is self limiting and the symptoms will last for 12 to 60 hours. They will start with sudden onset of nausea followed by projectile vomiting and watery diarrhoea. Some people may have a raised temperature, headaches and aching limbs. Most people make a full recovery between 1-2 days, however some people (usually the very young or elderly) may become very dehydrated and require hospital treatment.

## **Why does norovirus often cause outbreaks?**

Norovirus often causes outbreaks because it easily spread from one person to another and 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 50% of susceptible people. Outbreaks usually tend to affect people who are in semi-closed environments such as hospitals, nursing homes and cruise ships.

## **How can 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. The most effective way to respond to an outbreak is to disinfect contaminated areas, to instate good hand-washing and to provide advice on food handling. Those who have been infected should be isolated for up to 48 hours after their symptoms have ceased.

## **How is the 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.

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

Good hygiene is important in preventing others from becoming infected – this includes thorough hand washing before and after contact. Food preparation should also be avoided until 48 hours after the symptoms have subsided.

### **Who is at risk of getting norovirus?**

Norovirus is not a notifiable disease and reporting is done on a voluntary basis. It is estimated that norovirus affects between 600,000 and a million people in the UK each year.

### **Are there any long term effects?**

No, there are no long-term effects from norovirus

### **What can be done to prevent infection?**

It is not always possible to prevent infection, however, taking good hygiene measures (such as frequent hand washing) around someone who is infected is important. Certain measures can be taken in the event of an outbreak, including the implementation of basic hygiene and food handling measures and prompt disinfection of contaminated areas, and the isolation if those infected for 48 hours after their symptoms have ceased.

### **Guidance on infection control in schools and other child care settings**

## **Hand washing: the simplest and most important infection control measure**

In schools and nurseries the most recognised way that childhood infections are easily spread is through hands, touching children, staff and physical surfaces such as tabletops, taps toilet seats and handles. Examples of these infections include:

- Diarrhoea and vomiting; including norovirus infection and that caused by E.Coli O157, one of the most serious gastro-intestinal infections
- Germs causing upper respiratory tract infections and influenza
- Other childhood infections including impetigo and hand, foot and mouth disease.

Hand washing remains the most important step in preventing such infections. Hand washing, under supervision, should also take place on arrival and departure so children do not bring infection to school or take it home.

It is important that hands are washed correctly, refer to diagram on next page, but always remember to wet hands before applying one push of liquid soap. Liquid soap is preferred rather than bar soap, which increases the risk of cross contamination i.e. the germs of the previous user(s) stay on the soap. For the same reason nail brushes should not be used.

# Handwashing Technique



(a) Wet hands under running water



(b) Apply soap and rub palms together to ensure complete coverage



(c) Spread the lather over the backs of the hands



(d) Make sure the soap gets in between the fingers



(e) Grip the fingers on each hand



(f) Pay particular attention to the thumbs



(g) Press fingertips into the palm of each hand



(h) Dry thoroughly with a clean towel