



# Indiana State Department of Health

## Epidemiology Resource Center

### Quick Facts

#### About...Norovirus (Viral Gastroenteritis)

##### What is norovirus?

Norovirus is a highly contagious illness involving inflammation of the stomach and intestines. The infection can produce severe symptoms, but most persons recover quickly and without seeking medical attention. Norovirus is more common in the late fall through the winter, but infections and outbreaks can occur year round.

"Stomach flu" and "food poisoning" are common, but misleading terms for norovirus. Norovirus is **not** the same illness as the flu, a respiratory illness caused by different viruses which produce symptoms such as fever, aches, sneezing, and coughing. The flu does not cause diarrhea or vomiting. Unlike actual food poisoning, norovirus does not come from food. To make someone ill, food must be contaminated by a sick person.

##### What are the symptoms of norovirus?

- Watery diarrhea
- Vomiting
- Nausea
- Cramps
- Fever
- Headache
- Muscle aches
- Tiredness

Symptoms usually begin 24-48 hours (range of 12-72 hours) after exposure and last 24-48 hours. The illness can last longer in the elderly or in those with weakened immune systems. It can be a serious illness.

##### How is norovirus spread?

Norovirus is passed in stool and vomit and people become ill by ingesting the stool or vomit from an infected person. The virus is easily spread by contaminated food or beverages, from person to person, and by contact with surfaces or objects with the virus on them. These viruses can remain infectious on surfaces for up to 72 hours, and only a very small amount of virus is needed to cause illness.

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

Anyone can become ill, but young children, senior adults, pregnant women, and immune suppressed individuals (such as patients on cancer drugs and with organ transplants) are at high risk for illness. You can have norovirus many times in your life.

## **How do I know if I have norovirus?**

A person having diarrhea lasting more than 24 hours should consult a health care provider. The illness is usually diagnosed by symptoms, duration of illness, and medical exam. Your health care provider may order tests to rule out other infections.

## **How is norovirus treated?**

There is no vaccine or medication to cure norovirus. Treatment is based on relieving symptoms. People with diarrhea and vomiting should drink plenty of fluids to avoid dehydration.

## **How is viral norovirus prevented?**

- Wash hands with soap and water after using the restroom; after changing diapers; after helping someone with diarrhea and/or vomiting; after swimming; and before, during, and after food preparation.
- Wash all produce before eating raw or cooking.
- Clean and disinfect contaminated surfaces.
- Wash contaminated laundry thoroughly.
- Persons with diarrhea and/or vomiting should not prepare food or provide health care for others and should limit direct contact with others as much as possible.
- Do not go swimming or use hot tubs if you have diarrhea and for at least two weeks after diarrhea stops.

All information presented is intended for public use. For more information, please refer to: <http://www.cdc.gov/norovirus/index.html>.

Food and Drug Administration, Food Facts for Consumers:  
<http://www.fda.gov/Food/ResourcesForYou/Consumers/ucm077286.htm>

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