



Indiana State Department of Health

Epidemiology Resource Center

Quick Facts

About...Norovirus (Viral Gastroenteritis)

What is Norovirus?

Norovirus is a highly contagious illness causing swelling of the stomach and intestines. The illness can produce severe symptoms, but most people get better quickly and without visiting the doctor. Norovirus is more common in the late fall through the winter, but illnesses and outbreaks can occur year round.

"Stomach flu" and "food poisoning" are common terms, but not the same as norovirus. The flu is a respiratory illness, caused by different germs than norovirus. The flu causes symptoms such as fever, aches, sneezing, and coughing, not diarrhea or vomiting. Unlike food poisoning, norovirus does not come from food; rather, the food has been contaminated from 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 consuming stool or vomit from a sick person. The germ is easily spread by contaminated food or beverages, from person to person, and by contact with surfaces or objects with the

germ on them. These germs can remain on the surfaces for up to 72 hours, and only a very small amount of the germ is needed to cause illness.

Who is at risk for getting norovirus?

Anyone can become ill, but young children, older adults, pregnant women, and individuals with weakened immune systems (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 visit a doctor. The illness can usually be diagnosed by symptoms, length of illness, and a medical exam. Your doctor may order tests to rule out other infections.

How is norovirus treated?

There is no vaccine or medicine 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 it raw or cooking it.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces that may have germs.
- Wash laundry that may have germs 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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