

Norovirus infection

Norovirus is a common viral cause of gastroenteritis (or 'gastro'). Vomiting is usually the main initial symptom, and there can be a lot of vomit. Other symptoms include diarrhoea, nausea, stomach cramps, fever, headache and muscle aches. Norovirus gastroenteritis can cause dehydration because of the large amount of fluid lost through vomiting and diarrhoea.

Outbreaks are common because norovirus spreads very easily and it only takes a small number of virus particles to make someone sick. The disease is more common from late winter to early summer.

People who have had norovirus before can be reinfected as new strains of the virus spread around the world every few years.

How it spreads

The virus is present in large amounts in the faeces (poo) and vomit of an infected person.

The disease spreads when norovirus enters the body. This can happen when:

- people inhale droplets produced when an infected person vomits
- people touch contaminated surfaces (including clothes) and then touch their mouth, nose or eyes
- people eat contaminated food.

Surfaces and food can become contaminated when:

- infected droplets are spread onto surfaces when an infected person vomits
- infected people do not wash their hands well after using the toilet and their hands contaminate food or surfaces
- people do not wash their hands well after changing the nappy of an infected baby and their hands contaminate food or surfaces.

Exclusion period

Exclude until there has not been any diarrhoea or vomiting for 48 hours.

Actions for educators and other staff

Follow the exclusion period in the *Staying healthy* guidelines.

Ensure staff and children have good hand hygiene. Hand washing is more effective against norovirus than hand sanitiser.

Ensure staff use appropriate cleaning practices, as described in the *Staying healthy* guidelines. Use disinfectants that are effective against norovirus.

The virus is relatively resistant to disinfectants, so thoroughly clean and disinfect any surfaces contaminated by vomit or diarrhoea, as well as bathrooms and high-touch surfaces. This reduces the risk of large outbreaks.

If you have 2 or more cases of gastroenteritis in your service, contact your local public health unit for advice. This is legally required in most states and territories (except South Australia).

Actions for parents and carers

Keep your child at home until there has been no diarrhoea for at least 48 hours and they feel well.

Give your child plenty of fluids and talk to your pharmacist about rehydration solution options.

See a doctor immediately if your child cannot keep down any fluids. Babies under 6 months should always be seen by a doctor if they have gastro.

More information about norovirus infection

See healthdirect for more information on prevention, diagnosis and treatment of norovirus (healthdirect.gov.au/norovirus-infection).

To find out if a child needs medical help:

- use the online symptom checker (healthdirect.gov.au/symptom-checker)
- speak to a registered nurse by calling the 24-hour health advice hotline on 1800 022 222.