

NOROVIRUS

(Winter vomiting disease)

Introduction

Noroviruses are a group of viruses that are also known as: 'winter vomiting disease', 'small round structured virus' (SRSV) and 'Norwalk-like viruses'. This group of viruses are one of the most common causes for stomach bugs also known as gastroenteritis in the UK. Norovirus can often cause outbreaks in schools, nursing homes and hospitals as it is very infectious. It is easily spread from one person to another and can survive in the environment for several days.

How the infection is spread

Norovirus can be spread easily from one person to another, by:

- Coming into contact with someone infected with the virus
- By eating contaminated food
- Drinking contaminated water
- Contact with surfaces and/or objects contaminated
- Contact with vomit or diarrhoea from an infected person

Interesting Fact: Did you know?

Norovirus infects between 600,000 and one million people in the UK every year.

Interesting Fact: Did you know?

Norovirus is also known as winter vomiting disease because people usually get it during winter.

However it can actually occur at any time of the year.

Immunity against the norovirus is short-lived therefore it is very possible to become infected again.

Symptoms

The main norovirus symptoms are:

- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Diarrhoea
- Stomach cramps

Other symptoms that people may have include:

- A fever (Temperature over 38C/100.4F)

- Headaches
- Aching/sore limbs

The first indicator of norovirus symptoms is usually a sudden onset of nausea, followed by vomiting and watery diarrhoea.

Due to the excessive vomiting and diarrhoea, this loss of body fluid can cause dehydration (not enough fluid in the body). Dehydration is a risk in the very young and the elderly.

Symptoms of dehydration include:

- Dizziness or light-headedness
- Headache
- Tiredness
- Dry mouth, lips and eyes
- Dark, concentrated urine
- Passing only small amounts of urine (fewer than three or four times a day)
- Thirst

Signs of severe dehydration can develop, such as an inability to pass urine and a low level of consciousness.

Signs of dehydration in babies/young children

- More than 6 hours without urinating
- Urine smells strong and/or is darker than usual
- Dry lips, mouth or eyes
- No tears when crying

Severe symptoms

- Sunken eyes
- Hands and feet feel cold and look blotchy
- Excessive sleepiness and fussiness

The symptoms of norovirus start one to two days after becoming infected with the virus and can last for 12-60 hours.

Most people can make a full recovery within 1-2 days however some people (very young and elderly) may become very dehydrated and therefore would need hospital treatment.

Diagnosis

Diagnosis for norovirus can usually be made from the symptoms and short duration of the illness. Sometimes stool samples are sent to the laboratory for testing to confirm the diagnosis.

Treatment

There is no specific treatment for norovirus infection. However, it is important to:

- Get plenty of rest
- Stay at home and isolate yourself from others to prevent the virus from spreading
- If needed, take paracetamol to relieve any symptoms of fever and body aches
- Drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration.
- Eat a light diet of foods which are easy to digest, such as soup, rice, pasta and bread. Babies should be given their normal feed.

To deal with the symptoms of dehydration you can take rehydration products or drinks. These solutions will replace the sugars, salts and minerals that you have lost from your body and help restore the natural balance of body fluids. These rehydration solutions can be purchased from chemists, but please ask the advice of your pharmacist or GP.

Dehydration in the vulnerable

If symptoms persist for more than 48 hours in the elderly and they become severely dehydrated, seek medical advice by calling your GP or NHS Direct.

Babies can become dangerously dehydrated. If you suspect a baby is dehydrated it may be necessary to take them to an A&E department at your nearest hospital.

Prevention and protection

It is extremely important to ensure thorough cleaning of all surfaces and/or objects that have been in contact or near to someone who has the norovirus.

Within the hospital, people who have the norovirus are put into isolation, which means that they will be put into a room by themselves away from others to prevent spreading of the infection to other patients.

There are certain practices which can help reduce the spread of all viruses, including norovirus. These include:

- Maintenance of good hand hygiene by washing hands frequently with soap and water (alcohol gels/rubs are not effective against the norovirus), especially after use of toilet and before dealing with food
- Teach and encourage children to wash their hands thoroughly
- Wash raw fruit and vegetables before use
- Avoid eating raw food (oysters from good source as these have been known to contain the norovirus). In norovirus outbreaks due to infected food, shellfish is the most common cause. Therefore it is important that shellfish is cooked thoroughly
- Do not share towels or linen
- Wash any linen, clothing and towels separately and on a hot wash to kill the virus
- Flush away infected vomit and faeces within the toilet and keeping the area around this clean
- Clean hard surfaces (e.g. handles) regularly using household cleaning products.

Useful links:

For further of information on norovirus please visit the links below:

[NHS CHOICES / NHS direct](#)

[DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH](#)

[HPA](#)

[PATIENT UK](#)

Acknowledgements:

1. NHS Choices website : <http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Norovirus/Pages/Introduction.aspx>
2. HPA. Norovirus factsheet:
http://www.wirral.nhs.uk/document_uploads/Infection_Prevention_Control/Noroviruspack_FactsheetSept08.pdf
3. Old UHL website