



Remember these main points:

- Norovirus causes diarrhoea and vomiting
- It spreads easily
- It is rarely serious but symptoms can last for two or more days
- Hand washing, thorough cleaning and isolation is the key to preventing the spread.

ANY QUESTIONS?

If you need any further information or advice please ask a nurse on the ward/facility.

You can also contact the Infection Prevention & Control Unit.

REFERENCES

1. The Blue Book, Guidelines for the Control of Infectious Diseases, Department of Human Services, May 2008.
2. Gastro-Info. Gastroenteritis Kit for Aged care Australian Government Department of Health & Ageing 2008.

This Brochure is based on the latest information available at the time of production.

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NOROVIRUS

(Viral Gastroenteritis)



An information leaflet for
patients, relatives and
health care workers

RICPRAC
RURAL INFECTION CONTROL
PRACTICE GROUP

What is Norovirus?

The Norovirus has become the most common cause of gastroenteritis. Gastro is also known as a “tummy bug”.

Norovirus is much more common than other well known gut infections such as Salmonella. It only affects humans and there are up to 1 million cases of it every year.

There is usually a peak of infection in the winter.

The incubation period for Norovirus is usually 27-72 hours. This is the time between contracting the virus and experiencing the symptoms.

The symptoms include:

- Feeling sick, nauseous
- Vomiting (often sudden and severe)
- Diarrhoea

Although this is an unpleasant disease, it is rarely dangerous. Usually symptoms last for two days and most people make a full and speedy recovery and in most cases no specific treatment is required.

As soon as the vomiting has stopped, it is sensible to drink plenty of clear fluid (such as water), to avoid dehydration.

How is it spread?

Norovirus is spread very easily from one person to another (rather like the common cold). We cannot see the virus so it is important to understand how we can get it.

The virus can be spread by:

- not washing hands after using the toilet
- being exposed to the virus from vomit
- touching surfaces such as furniture, door handles, phones, etc.
- touching other people's hands
- contaminated food

Only a few virus particles are needed to cause illness in a susceptible person.

Infection can spread very easily in areas where there are large numbers of people such as schools, nursing homes, hospitals and hotels.

People remain infectious for at least 48 hours after symptoms have ceased.

Affected health care workers must not return to work for 48 hours post cessation of symptoms



How can we prevent it?

Because the virus spreads so quickly and easily, not all infections can be prevented. However, the following measures will reduce the chance of it spreading:

1. GOOD HANDWASHING

Hand Washing with liquid soap and water is the key to the prevention of Norovirus infection. Hands must be washed before handling food and after visiting the toilet. Anyone with diarrhoea should not prepare or handle food for others. *Alcohol gel or rub can be used after hand washing but not instead of, as there is insufficient evidence available to prove that gels or rubs kill Norovirus.*

2. PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT

- Wear a mask when attending people who are vomiting
- Cover clothing with gown/apron when providing direct care
- Only wear gloves when handling blood & body fluids.

3. CLEANING SURFACES

The virus can remain alive for days on floors and surfaces so vomit or diarrhoea should be cleaned up immediately. We advise to clean with detergent followed by diluted bleach to sanitise surfaces.

4. ISOLATING PEOPLE WITH THE VIRUS

If a whole hospital ward is affected, it may need to be closed and new admissions be redirected.

Other measures to prevent the infection spreading may include restricting visitors. This may mean that only very close relatives may visit, even then it is only with the permission of the nurse in charge. If you are visiting a ward where there are cases of Norovirus you are at risk of getting the infection.