

Norovirus

Description

Gastroenteritis can be caused by noroviruses.

Vomiting is usually the main symptom and can be violent and profuse. Other symptoms may include diarrhoea, nausea, stomach cramps, fever, headache and muscle aches.

The illness is highly infectious and often occurs in outbreaks. It is highly infectious for several reasons. Vomit can contain one million virus particles per millilitre. Faeces are also very infectious. Because violent vomiting can produce aerosolised particles (particles suspended in the air) or can contaminate surfaces, norovirus is easily spread. It only takes a small number of germs to cause an infection and the germs are resistant to disinfectants.

The viruses can spread in many different ways:

- Person-to-person (eg. by germs from vomit or faeces getting onto hands then into someone else's mouth).
- Aerosols from projectile vomiting.
- Food (for example, an infected person with germs on their hands can contaminate food, as can aerosols from vomiting).
- Surfaces that become contaminated (eg. toilets).
- Contaminated water.

Incubation period

About 15 to 48 hours.

Infectious period

For as long as symptoms are present, and usually for 48 hours after symptoms have stopped. Some people are still infectious up to 10 days after symptoms have stopped.

Exclusion period

Children are to be excluded from the centre until there has not been a loose bowel motion or vomiting for 48 hours .

Staff who handle food should be excluded from food preparation, food handling and assisting others with feeding until at least 48 hours after the symptoms have stopped. Large outbreaks have occurred when food handlers have returned to preparing food while still infectious⁷⁰.

Responsibilities of child care providers/staff

Report the infection to the director.

Contact your public health unit if two or more children in one group are ill. Public health workers may be able to help identify how the infectious agent has spread through the centre and will provide advice on how to prevent a large scale outbreak occurring.

Responsibilities of parents

Observe the exclusion period.

Controlling the spread of infection

Do not prepare food for anyone until at least 48 hours after recovery.

Ensure hands are washed thoroughly, especially after going to the toilet, before eating, before preparing or handling food, after changing infants' nappies and after supervising children at the toilet.

Make sure that effective hand washing and cleaning procedures are being followed in the centre and at home.

Surfaces that could have become contaminated should be scrupulously **cleaned, first with detergent and water** to ensure no particles remain, followed by disinfectant (eg. bleach diluted 1 in 10).

Make sure that all surfaces are kept clean including kitchens and bathrooms.

Treatment

Plenty of fluids (eg. water, dilute fruit juice or special oral rehydration solutions) should be consumed to prevent dehydration, see 'Safe Drinks' on page 59. Food can be eaten as tolerated. Antibiotics will not help as they do not kill viruses.