



Norovirus Facts

What are Noroviruses?

Noroviruses are a group of viruses that cause the “stomach flu,” or gastroenteritis (GAS-tro-en-ter-I-tis), in people. Norovirus is also commonly known as Norwalk or the “cruise ship virus.

What are the symptoms of noroviruses?

The symptoms of norovirus illness usually include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and some stomach cramping. Sometimes people also have a low-grade fever, chills, headache, muscle aches, and a general sense of tiredness. The illness often begins suddenly, and the infected person may feel very sick. The illness is usually brief, with symptoms lasting from 12 hours to 5 days. In general, children experience more vomiting than do adults. Most people with norovirus illness experience both diarrhea and vomiting.

How serious is norovirus disease?

Norovirus disease is usually not serious, although people may feel very sick and vomit many times a day. Most people get better within 1 or 2 days, and they have no long-term health effects related to the norovirus. However, sometimes people become dehydrated due to vomiting and diarrhea and may need special medical attention. Children and infants, the elderly, and persons with weakened immune systems are more likely to experience dehydration, hospitalization, and complications, including death.

How do people become infected with noroviruses?

This virus is very contagious and can spread rapidly. Noroviruses are found in the stool or vomit of infected people. The virus can then be passed directly to other people or to the environment (handrails, walls, toys, tables, countertops), where other people pick it up. People can become infected with the virus in several ways, including:

- Eating food or drinking liquids that are contaminated with norovirus;
- Touching surfaces or objects contaminated with norovirus, and then placing their hand in their mouth;
- Having direct contact with another person who is infected and showing symptoms (for example, when caring for someone with illness, or sharing foods or eating utensils with someone who is ill).

When do symptoms begin?

Symptoms of norovirus illness usually begin about 24 to 48 hours after ingestion of the virus, but they can appear as early as 12 hours after exposure.

How long are people contagious?

People infected with norovirus are contagious from the moment they begin feeling ill to at least 3 days after recovery. Some people may be contagious for as long as 2 weeks after recovery. Therefore, it is very important to use good handwashing and other hygienic practices and not to prepare food while you are contagious.

What’s the best way to prevent spreading Norovirus to family, friends and community?

- Stay home when you are having symptoms.
- Use a separate bathroom if possible and wash your hands thoroughly after each episode.

- Thoroughly clean and disinfect contaminated surfaces immediately after an episode of illness by using a solution as described below.
- Immediately remove and wash clothing or linens that may be contaminated with virus after an episode of illness (use hot water and soap). Soiled linens and clothes should be handled as little as possible, and with minimum agitation to prevent microbial contamination of the air and people.
- Encourage the use of closed toilet lids while flushing. This may help cut down on virus being projected into the air in tiny droplets of water.
- **Persons who are infected with norovirus should not prepare food while they have symptoms and for 3 days after they recover from their illness.** Food that may have been contaminated by an ill person should be disposed of properly.
- **People in occupations that, by their nature, can easily spread illness need to stay home for 48-72 hours after symptoms stop. Sensitive occupations include food handlers, daycare providers and health care providers.**

Can norovirus infections be prevented?

Yes. You can decrease your chance of coming in contact with noroviruses by following these preventive steps:

- Frequently wash your hands, especially after toilet visits and changing diapers and before eating or preparing food.
- Carefully wash fruits and vegetables, and steam oysters before eating them.

What is an effective cleaner and disinfectant?

The most effective disinfectant for noroviruses is chlorine based. Use chlorine bleach from a **new bottle** in the following concentrations for these surfaces: with a **contact time of 10-20 minutes**

200 ppm (5 tablespoons of bleach in 1 gallon of water)

Stainless Steel, food/mouth contact items

1000 ppm (1/3 cup in 1 gallon of water)

Non-porous surfaces – Tile floors, counter-tops, sinks, toilets.

5000 ppm (1 and 2/3 cups bleach in 1 gallon of water)

Porous surfaces—wooden floors

Carpet – Pickup visible organic debris with absorbent material and discard in a plastic bag. Steam clean @ 158° F for five minutes or 212° F for 1 minute.

Linens/clothing /textiles – remove visible organic debris with absorbent material and discard in a plastic bag. Keep contaminated and uncontaminated clothes separate. Minimize disruption of soiled linens and laundry to minimize aerosols. Wash in a pre-wash cycle, then use a regular wash cycle using detergent and dry separately from contaminated clothing at temp greater than 170 degrees F.

How do I protect myself when using chlorine bleach?

- Never ever mix other cleaners/disinfectants/or other chemicals with bleach.
- Prepare your bleach solution in a well-ventilated area. Chlorine bleach is corrosive and an irritant to skin, eyes, upper and lower respiratory tract and all mucosal tissue.
- Avoid spray bottle application of disinfectants.
- Use disposable gloves (a heavier glove is necessary when working with 1000 ppm and 5000 ppm dilutions), masks, eye protection and gown or protective clothing when working with 1000 ppm and 5000 ppm dilutions of bleach disinfectant especially.