



Norovirus Information for Foodhandlers

WHAT ARE NOROVIRUSES?

Noroviruses are a group of viruses that cause the “stomach flu,” or gastroenteritis in people. Viruses are very different from bacteria and parasites. They are not affected by treatment with antibiotics, and they cannot grow outside of the body.

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.

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.

HOW DO PEOPLE BECOME INFECTED WITH NOROVIRUSES?

Noroviruses are found in the stool or vomit of infected people. A person is exposed when they get the virus in their mouth (Fecal/Oral Transmission) from:

- Eating food or drinking liquids that are contaminated with norovirus;
- Droplets when a fine mist of particles is released in a wide area in the air when sudden projectile illness occurs or flushing a toilet after an ill or recently ill person uses
 - Persons in a restaurant several tables away from a vomiting patron have been made ill. Soiled areas can harbor the virus for weeks given certain conditions. Once in an environment, movements of people and materials can spread it easily.
- Touching surfaces or objects contaminated with norovirus, and then placing their hand in their mouth;

HOW DOES FOOD BECOME CONTAMINATED WITH NOROVIRUS?

Food can become contaminated with Norovirus from sewage contaminated water, from droplet contamination, and from ill foodhandlers.

EMPLOYEE HEALTH

Exclude from work ALL foodhandlers with symptoms of nausea, vomiting or diarrhea. Ill staff should remain away from work for a minimum of 48-72 hours following the disappearance of symptoms.

If a **foodhandler becomes ill while at work**, the employee should be excluded from the food preparation area immediately and asked to not return until symptom free for at least 48 hours. See below for clean-up methods.

PERSONAL HYGIENE:

Although only a small amount of virus is required to cause illness, decontaminating the hands through proper hand washing may make it more difficult to transmit an infective dose through foods. If good personal hygiene is maintained, even those with infections may be less of a threat. Wash with warm (110° F.) water and soap for 20 seconds, rinse thoroughly, dry with a paper towel.

Because norovirus is a fecal-oral agent, it is essential to wash thoroughly after using the toilet. Minimize handling of ready-to-eat foods by using gloves, tongs, or utensils. It is also critical for a food worker to wash hands before putting on gloves, beginning work, or between tasks.

PROTECTION OF BUFFET AND SALAD BARS:

Serving utensils or foods on a self-service or buffet type service style in contact with the hands of customers are bound to contain large number of microbes, and possibly Norovirus. There are certain good practices that may help to lessen the chance for patron-to-food contamination:

- Provide long handled spoons, forks, and tongs and other utensils
- Provide the proper serving utensil for the container and the food
- Keep the handles out of the foods
- Maintain all foods under sneeze guards
- Inspect the self service area frequently, about every 15 minutes
- Sanitize all utensils every hour or replace
- Have adults serve children

Additional measures could include having servers doing the plating at the salad bar, or to discontinue any self-service food.

CLEANING AND DISINFECTING

1. Designate regular cleaning of all hand contact surfaces (e.g., handrails, doorknobs, faucets, etc.) and restrooms with an appropriate germicidal product.
2. Alcohol based hand sanitizers are ineffective against some gastrointestinal viruses and must not be used in place of hand washing.
3. 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

4. **Bathroom cleaning:**

Clean and disinfect public bathrooms every hour using disposable cloths

FECAL OR VOMIT ACCIDENTS:

Those tasked with clean-up **must be protected** by using disposable rubber gloves, and a disposable apron, and a mask.

Cleaning **large spills** of vomitus/stool (2 step process)

1. Pickup visible organic debris with absorbent material and discard in a plastic bag to prevent aerosols.
2. Liberally disinfect area and objects surrounding the contamination with bleach solution of appropriate concentration and allow for a sufficient contact time.

Specific Clean Up Procedures

1. If a food handler becomes **ill in the Food Preparation Area**:
 - Dispose of all exposed foods within 25 feet of the contamination
 - Dispose of any food prepared by the ill employee
 - Use paper towels to soak up as much of the soil (vomitus) as possible
 - Be careful not to drip or splash the soil
 - Clean and sanitize the contaminated area with an approved compound for Norovirus
 - Clean and sanitize the entire food preparation area with disposable cloths including both horizontal and vertical surfaces
 - Dispose of all waste material in sealed plastic bags
 - Close this area off for at least an hour after vomiting has occurred whenever possible, as the agent can be airborne in the form of tiny droplets.
 - If windows are available, air out the area
 - Wash hands thoroughly before resuming work
2. **Hard Surfaces** – Disinfect with bleach, allow 10-20 minutes contact time and rinse with clean water.
3. **Carpet** – Pickup visible organic debris with absorbent material and discarded in a plastic bag. Steam clean @ 158 degrees F for Five minutes or 212 degrees for 1 minute.
4. **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.

QUESTIONS:

The spread of norovirus is controllable. If we can be of any assistance, please don't hesitate to call the Lewis & Clark City-County Health Department at 406-443-2584.

The Lewis & Clark City-County Health Department's mission is to improve and protect the health of all Lewis & Clark County residents.

"Where Prevention Pays"