

Norovirus

What is Norovirus?

Norovirus is a very common cause of diarrhea and vomiting in humans. Some people call it “stomach flu” or gastroenteritis. Symptoms often begin suddenly and may include watery diarrhea, vomiting, cramps, headache, fever, chills, and sore throat. The illness usually lasts one to two days and is generally not serious. There are no long-term effects related to a Norovirus infection, but dehydration in very young children, the elderly, or people with weakened immune systems can occur.

How is Norovirus spread?

Norovirus is spread very easily. The virus is found in an infected person’s stool or vomit. Any contact with the contaminated stool or vomit can make you ill. For example, you can become infected by touching objects contaminated with the virus and then putting your hand in your mouth without first washing your hands. Another way to become infected is by eating foods or drinking water contaminated with the virus.

How can I protect myself?

Thorough handwashing is the best prevention. Wash your hands after using the toilet or changing diapers. Hands should also be washed before preparing food, eating, or helping someone else eat.

Follow these steps:

- Wet your hands with warm water.
- Use soap.
- Rub hands and lather for at least 15 seconds.
- Rinse with your fingertips pointing down so the lather goes towards the drain.
- Dry hands thoroughly, pat the skin gently to avoid chapping and cracking.

Besides washing your hands, also make sure you:

- Thoroughly wash all fruits and vegetables before eating them.
- Clean and sanitize washrooms and had contact surfaces such as hand rails, doorknobs, and phones at least once a day. Use a solution made of one part bleach to ten parts water.
- Stay home for at least 48 hours after vomiting or diarrhea have stopped. This is especially important if you work with young children, the elderly, in an institutional setting, or handle food.
- Drink lots of clear fluids while you are ill to prevent dehydration.
- See a doctor if diarrhea or vomiting lasts more than two to three days.
- Flush any vomit and/or stool down the toilet immediately. Make sure to clean and sanitize the toilet afterwards.

Where can I get more information?

For more information on Norovirus, visit www.wdgpUBLICHEALTH.ca

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