

INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS

Norovirus - discharge information

The aim of this leaflet is to provide background information and advice on what to do if there is a risk of spreading norovirus in the home following your discharge.

What is norovirus?

Norovirus consists of several groups of viruses. Common names for the illness caused by these viruses are viral gastroenteritis, acute nonbacterial gastroenteritis, food poisoning and food infection. The illness is sometimes referred to as 'winter vomiting disease' even though it can now occur all year round.

A mild and brief illness usually develops 12-48 hours after infection and lasts for 24-60 hours. There are no treatments available, but the disease is self-limiting and mild. The main symptoms of infection are projectile vomiting, nausea, diarrhoea and abdominal pain. Headache and mild fever may also occur. The virus is highly contagious and can spread rapidly from person to person via hands and surfaces.

Good hygiene is vital to break the chain of infection in the home to other family members.

How does norovirus spread in the home and cause infection?

Norovirus spreads via the common routes for stomach bugs.

It enters the body to infect the gastrointestinal tract via the mouth, either on food or by contaminated hands touching the mouth.

Infected family members can spread infection in several ways. Projectile vomiting is the major cause of cross-infection. The spray created by vomiting settles on surfaces in the home where the virus can remain infective on hard surfaces and fabrics for several days. The virus can multiply in the stomach and large quantities of virus are then passed in faeces into the toilet. Where someone has fluid diarrhoea, flushing the toilet produces spray which can settle on surfaces such as the toilet seat or toilet flush handle.

The spread of infection from an infected to an unaffected family member can occur in several ways:

- **From hand to mouth**

By shaking hands with an infected person, touching a surface which has been contaminated by infected spray or touched by an infected person.

- **Via food**

By an infected family member handling or preparing ready-to-eat foods, such as sandwiches and salads, for other family members.

- **Via infected vomit**

There is some evidence to suggest that infection can occur by breathing infected spray from vomit. This probably occurs mainly if family members are near the infected person during, or immediately after, a vomiting attack.

Care of a person at home with norovirus

There is no treatment available for norovirus infections, but the symptoms usually only last for one to three days. Affected individuals should drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration as this can easily occur, especially in very young and elderly people. As far as possible the infected person should keep away from other family members during the vomiting phase. They should also keep away from work, college, school or nursery for at least three days after symptoms have subsided to avoid passing on the infection to others.

Preventing the spread of norovirus infection in the home

In situations where there is risk of spreading infection in the home, the following hygiene measures should be observed. It must be remembered that norovirus can also be spread by people who have no symptoms – both by those who have apparently recovered and those who have not yet developed symptoms:

- Good hand washing practice is the single most important infection control measure.
- Hands should be thoroughly washed with soap and running water.

- Hygienically clean surfaces in the bathroom and toilet, with particular attention to washbasins, baths, toilet seats, toilet handles and showers. This can be achieved by cleaning with a detergent cleaner followed by thorough rinsing under running water. Where this is not possible, for example toilet seats and toilet flush handle, use a disinfectant cleaner. If someone has diarrhoea, toilets should be disinfected after each use.
- Keep the infected person's immediate environment hygienically clean. The most important surfaces are those which come into contact with the hands, for example door handles, telephones, bedside tables, bed frames, computer keyboards and TV remote controls. To make these surfaces hygienically clean, use a disinfectant cleaner. For items such as shared computer keyboards which might be damaged by cleaning, it is better to make sure the family always wash their hands before using the equipment. In a busy household it is not always possible to keep hand contact surfaces hygienically clean at all times, which is why it is so important to wash hands as frequently as possible to break the chain of infection.
- Cleaning cloths can easily spread norovirus around the home. They should be hygienically cleaned after each use, particularly after use in the immediate area around the infected person, or the bathroom and toilet used by that person. Use disposable cloths where possible.

If this is not possible, follow one of the following recommendations:

- Wash in a washing machine at 60°C (hot wash).
- Clean with detergent and warm water, rinse and then immerse in disinfectant solution for at least 20 minutes.
- Clean with detergent and water then immerse in boiling water for 20 minutes.
- Where floors or other surfaces become contaminated with faeces or vomit, they should be hygienically cleaned at once:
 - Remove as much as possible of the spillage from the surface using paper or a disposable cloth.
 - Apply disinfectant cleaner to the surface using a fresh cloth or paper towel to remove residual dirt.
 - Apply disinfectant cleaner to the surface a second time using a fresh cloth or paper towel to destroy any residual contamination.
 - Disposable gloves should be worn if in contact with faeces, and hands should be washed after removing gloves.
- After someone has vomited, if possible, vacate the room and ventilate it by opening windows for a short time to disperse spray particles.
- Clothing, sheets, pillows and linens from the infected person (or carrier) should be kept separate from the rest of the family laundry and should be laundered in a manner which kills any norovirus:

- Preferably wash at 60°C or above using any laundry product, as heat will destroy norovirus.
- Wash at 40°C using a bleach-containing laundry (powder or tablet) product; washing at 40°C without the presence of bleach will not destroy norovirus.
- Do not share towels, facecloths, toothbrushes and other personal hygiene items with the infected person.
- Where young children are ill, or at particular risk:
 - Their hand washing, personal and toilet hygiene may need supervision.
 - Nappies should be disposed of safely, or cleaned, disinfected and washed. Contrary to popular belief, the faeces of babies can be highly infectious.

Food and kitchen hygiene

Rigorous food hygiene is important in preventing the spread of norovirus in the home. Where there is an infected person in the home, food hygiene practices should focus on preventing contamination of food, particularly ready-to-eat foods such as sandwiches and salads:

- Infected people should try to stay away from the kitchen and should not prepare food for others.
- Wash hands after handling food which may be contaminated.
- Wash hands before handling ready to eat foods.

- Hygienically clean all food contact surfaces, utensils and cloths after handling and preparation of raw foods using a disinfectant cleaner.
- Hygienically clean all contact surfaces, utensils and cloths before handling and/or preparing ready to eat foods.
- Cook foods thoroughly.
- Thoroughly wash any foods such as fruit and vegetables to be eaten raw under clean running water.
- Store foods carefully in a refrigerator or freezer; ensure raw foods are kept separate from cooked foods.

How to wash your hands

Hand washing technique is very important. Rubbing with soap and water lifts the germs off the hands, but rinsing under running water is also vital because this process actually removes the germs from the hands. The accepted procedure for hand washing is:

- Ensure a supply of liquid soap, warm running water, and a clean hand towel.
- Always wash hands under warm running water, wet your hands first.
- Apply the liquid soap.
- Rub hands together for 15–30 seconds, paying particular attention to your fingertips, thumbs and between your fingers.
- Rinse well and dry thoroughly.

One very simple thing which people can do to significantly reduce the risk of disease is to avoid putting their fingers to their mouth.

Who do I contact if I become unwell?

Your local GP should be your first point of contact if you are feeling unwell, or you could contact NHS Direct on 111 for advice.

Contact details

If you have any further questions or concerns, please talk to one of your nurses or a member of the Infection Prevention and Control Team.

The team is available seven days a week, 8am to 4pm, and there is an answer phone outside these hours:

- Telephone: 01623 622515 extension 3840/3525.

Useful websites

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/public-health-england>

World Health Organisation: [World Patient Safety Day 2023: Engaging Patients for Patient Safety \(who.int\)](https://www.who.int/patientsafety/2023)

Further sources of information

NHS Choices: www.nhs.uk/conditions

Our website: www.sfh-tr.nhs.uk

Patient Experience Team (PET)

PET is available to help with any of your compliments, concerns or complaints, and will ensure a prompt and efficient service.

King's Mill Hospital: 01623 672222

Newark Hospital: 01636 685692

Email: sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net

If you would like this information in an alternative format, for example large print or easy read, or if you need help with communicating with us, for example because you use British Sign Language, please let us know. You can call the Patient Experience Team on 01623 672222 or email sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net.

This document is intended for information purposes only and should not replace advice that your relevant health professional would give you.

External websites may be referred to in specific cases. Any external websites are provided for your information and convenience. We cannot accept responsibility for the information found on them.

If you require a full list of references for this leaflet, please email sfh-tr.patientinformation@nhs.net or telephone 01623 622515, extension 6927.

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