



## **Norovirus**

(PUBLIC HANDOUT)

### **What are Noroviruses?**

Noroviruses are a group of viruses that cause the “stomach flu.” Noroviruses are not affected by treatment with antibiotics, and also cannot grow outside of a person’s body.

### **Who gets norovirus infection?**

Anyone can become infected with these viruses. There are many different kinds of norovirus, which makes it difficult for a person’s body to develop long-lasting immunity. Therefore, norovirus illnesses can repeat throughout a person’s lifetime. In addition, because of differences in genetic factors, some people are more likely to become infected and develop more severe illness than others.

### **What are the symptoms of a norovirus?**

The symptoms of norovirus illness usually include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and some stomach cramping. Sometimes people also have a low fever, chills, headache, muscle aches, and a sense of tiredness. The illness often begins right away, and the infected person may feel very sick. In most people the illness lasts for about 1 or 2 days. Additionally, children experience more vomiting than adults.

### **When do symptoms appear?**

Symptoms of norovirus illness usually begin about 1 to 2 days after contracting the virus, but they can appear as early as 12 hours after being in contact with it.

### **Are noroviruses contagious?**

Noroviruses are very contagious and can spread easily from person to person. Both stool and vomit are infected. Special care should be taken with young children in diapers who may have diarrhea.

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. It is very important for people to use good hand washing and other hygienic practices after they have recently recovered from norovirus illness.



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### **What treatment is available for people with norovirus infection?**

Currently, there are no medications that work against norovirus and there is no vaccine to prevent infection. Norovirus infection cannot be treated with antibiotics. This is because antibiotics work to fight bacteria and not viruses.

Norovirus illness is usually short-term in healthy individuals. When people are ill with vomiting and diarrhea, they should drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration. Dehydration in young children, the elderly, and the sick, can be common, and it is the most serious health problem that can result from norovirus infection. By drinking sports drinks, juice, or water, people can reduce their chance of becoming dehydrated.

### **How do people become infected with the norovirus?**

Noroviruses are found in the stool or vomit of infected people. People can become infected with the virus in many 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.
- Direct contact with another person who is infected and showing symptoms.

Persons working in day-care centers or nursing homes should pay special attention to children or residents who have norovirus illness. This virus is very contagious and can spread rapidly throughout such places.

### **How can people prevent themselves from getting norovirus?**

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

- Wash your hands, especially after using the bathroom and changing diapers and before eating or preparing food.
- Carefully wash fruits and vegetables, and steam oysters before eating them.

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- Carefully clean and disinfect contaminated surfaces immediately after an episode of illness by using a bleach-based household cleaner.
- Immediately remove and wash clothing or linens that may be contaminated with virus after an episode of illness (use hot water and soap).

### **Where can we get more information?**

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) at  
<http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/revb/gastro/norovirus-foodhandlers.htm>