

Norovirus

An illness requiring contact enteric precautions

This handout describes norovirus, who is at risk for getting the disease, how it can be spread, and how to keep others from getting it.

What is norovirus?

Norovirus is the name of a group of viruses. These viruses are a common cause of viral *gastroenteritis* (“stomach flu”). It is sometimes called a “Norwalk-like virus.”

The illness usually affects groups of people, mostly adults or older children. Some outbreaks have been linked to banquets, cruise ships, nursing homes, healthcare facilities, cafeterias, swimming pools, campgrounds and lakes, hotels, schools, and fast-food restaurants.

People with a norovirus infection may feel very sick for several days. The disease is rarely serious. But if someone with norovirus loses a lot of fluids, they may need a hospital stay.

How is norovirus spread?

The norovirus organism is found in stool (*feces*) and vomit. People can become infected if they eat or drink contaminated foods. They can also get sick if they touch something that is soiled with stool or vomit and then touch their mouth or other areas of their body.

Anyone can spread the virus to others or themselves if they are infected and do not wash their hands.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms begin within 12 to 48 hours after being exposed to the virus. They usually last 12 to 60 hours. Symptoms can include:

- Nausea and vomiting
- Watery diarrhea
- Stomach cramps
- Fever, chills, headache, and muscle aches



Stomach cramps are one symptom of a norovirus infection.



To Learn More

To learn more about norovirus, visit these websites:

- www.cdc.gov/norovirus/index.html
- www.kingcounty.gov/depts/health/communicable-diseases/disease-control/norovirus.aspx

How can I protect others from norovirus at home?

Follow these precautions to reduce the spread of norovirus to others:

- Wash your hands with soap and water. This is very important after using the restroom, after changing diapers, before preparing food, and before eating.
- Flush vomit and stool down the toilet.
- Clean contaminated countertops, toilets, and floors right away with soap and water. Then disinfect them with a solution of ½ cup bleach mixed with 1 gallon of water. Leave on the surface for 10 minutes and then rinse with water and air dry. Steam cleaning can disinfect carpets.
- Wash soiled clothing and linens right away with hot water and soap.
- Do **not** prepare food or have contact with healthy people for at least 3 days after your last symptoms occurred.
- Wash raw fruits and vegetables.
- Do **not** eat raw oysters.

How does UWMC protect people from norovirus?

At UW Medical Center, we place a “Contact Enteric Precautions” sign near the door of your room if you have norovirus. Contact enteric precautions help prevent infections that spread through stool and vomit. This sign tells healthcare workers and visitors to use precautions when caring for you or when touching items in the room.

What happens when I am “in precautions”?

While you are “in precautions”:

- Hospital staff will wear gowns and gloves when caring for you.
- Hand washing and keeping your room clean are high priorities.
- You will be asked to stay in your room unless you need to go to other areas of the hospital for treatment.
- If you go to other areas for tests or treatments, we will ask you to wash your hands and to wear a gown and gloves on the way there.
- Please do not use the nutrition rooms while you are in precautions. When you want a snack or water, ask a member of your healthcare team to bring it to you.

When can the contact precautions be stopped?

Precautions can usually be stopped 3 days after the last symptoms have occurred.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

Infection Prevention:
206.598.6122