

Lake County Health Department

Information Sheet

Norovirus

What is Norovirus?

Norovirus is a group of viruses that cause vomiting and/or diarrhea in people often mistakenly called the “stomach flu”. Anyone can become infected with these viruses. Because there are many different strains of norovirus, the norovirus infection and illness can reoccur throughout a person’s lifetime.

What are the systems of an infection with these viruses?

The most common systems are nausea, vomiting, diarrhea and cramps. These symptoms occur in all age groups although diarrhea is more common among adults and vomiting is more common in children. Many persons also experience headache, fever, chills and muscle aches.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms usually begin 1 or 2 days after ingesting the virus, but may appear as early as 12 hours after exposure. The illness often comes on suddenly. The infected person may feel sick and vomit often, sometimes without warning, many times a day. Sometimes people infected with Norovirus have no symptoms at all, but can still pass the illness to others.

How long does it last?

Most people recover in 1 or 2 days and have no long-term adverse health effects. Sometimes infected people may experience milder symptoms for a week or more.

How is Norovirus spread?

Noroviruses are very contagious and spread easily from person to person. The virus is found in the stool and vomit of infected people. People can become infected in several ways, including eating food or drinking liquids that are contaminated by an infected food handler, contact with another person who is infected, touching surfaces or objects contaminated with norovirus and then touching their mouth before hand-washing..

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. Therefore, it is particularly important for people to use good hand washing and other hygienic practices after they have recently recovered from Norovirus illness. Particular care should be taken with young children in diapers who may have diarrhea.

Do infected people need to be excluded from school or daycare?

Since the virus is passed in vomit and stool, children should not go to daycare or school while they have diarrhea or vomiting. Once illness ends, children can return to daycare, but hand washing must be strictly monitored. **Persons who work in nursing homes, take care of patients or handle food should stay out of work until at least three days after symptoms end.**

What is the treatment for this illness?

There is no treatment for this illness. Most people recover in two to three days after they become ill. Supportive treatment to prevent dehydration may be needed in severe cases.

How can I prevent Norovirus infections?

- Wash your hands often!
 - After using the bathroom
 - After changing diapers
 - Before preparing foods
 - Before eating
- Wash your hands more often when someone in your household is sick.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces with household bleach immediately after vomiting or diarrheal accidents.
- Wash and/or peel fruits and vegetables before eating them.
- *Avoid preparing food for others while you have symptoms and for at least 3 days after you recover.*