



# Norovirus

## Centre for Disease Control Fact sheet

### What is norovirus infection?

Norovirus is a virus that can cause infection of the gastrointestinal tract. It has been known previously as the “Norwalk virus”, “winter diarrhoea” and “winter vomiting disease”.

### What are the symptoms?

Norovirus infection causes sudden onset of profuse vomiting and/or watery diarrhoea and stomach cramps. Other symptoms may include fever, headache and muscle aches. Symptoms usually develop between 24 and 48 hours after ingestion of the virus, but may occur as early as 12 hours after exposure.

The illness is usually self-limiting, with recovery being complete within 72 hours of onset of symptoms.

### How is it spread?

Norovirus is highly infectious. Very few virus particles are necessary to cause infection, and as such it often occurs in outbreaks.

Norovirus can be found in the vomit or faeces of infected people and can be spread by the ingestion of tiny particles of vomit or faeces that have contaminated food or water. It can also be spread via direct contact with an infected person or via contaminated surfaces. Raw or undercooked seafood, such as oysters, have also been a source of infection.

### What is the infectious period?

People are infectious to others from the moment they are ill until 48 hours after symptoms have stopped. In some cases, a person can still be infectious up

to 2 weeks after recovery. Because of this long infectious period, it is particularly important to use good hand washing and other hygienic practices after norovirus infection.

There is no evidence that an infected person can become a long-term carrier of norovirus.

### Who is at risk?

All age groups may be affected by norovirus. Dehydration is the most common complication, especially amongst the very young and the elderly.

An episode of norovirus infection does not cause a person to be immune from norovirus for life. Therefore people may get sick if infected again on another occasion. There is no vaccination against norovirus.

### What is the treatment?

There is no medication that specifically treats norovirus infections. Management focuses on preventing and treating dehydration caused by vomiting or diarrhoea. Anyone with vomiting or diarrhoea should drink extra fluids to avoid dehydration. Rehydration therapy with oral glucose/electrolyte solution is particularly effective. If children refuse this solution, diluted fruit juice or soft drinks may be given (1 part juice/soft drink to 3 parts water).

Babies should continue to be offered their normal feeds plus extra fluids in between feeds.

Medicines to prevent vomiting or diarrhoea should not be given, especially to children, except when prescribed by a doctor.



### How can norovirus infection be controlled?

Good hygiene is important in limiting the spread of norovirus. Hands should be washed thoroughly with warm soapy water, particularly:

- after going to the toilet
- before preparing or handling food
- after every nappy change
- after touching soiled linen or clothing

Surfaces that may be contaminated (bathrooms, bench tops etc) should be cleaned thoroughly with a bleach-based product diluted 1 in 10 with water.

People with vomiting or diarrhoea should not prepare or handle food that will be eaten by others.

Health care workers and food handlers should not go back to work until 48 hours after diarrhoea and vomiting have ceased.

Children with vomiting or diarrhoea should not attend childcare/school until the symptoms have ceased.

Anyone with diarrhoea should not swim, wade or paddle in public pools.

Cooking oysters thoroughly before eating them will reduce the risk of infection.

### Should I see my doctor?

Children with diarrhoea, who vomit or who refuse extra fluids should see a doctor. Anyone with prolonged or severe diarrhoea or who is concerned about their symptoms should see a doctor.

Doctors and public health workers are interested in preventing outbreaks of diarrhoea. If there are two or more infected persons in a group, reporting the illness to the Centre for Disease Control may help public health officers identify the source of the infection and prevent further spread. Advice can also be provided on how to prevent a large scale outbreak occurring.

### For more information contact your nearest Centre for Disease Control.

Darwin	8922 8044
Katherine	8973 9049
Nhulunbuy	8987 0359
Tennant Creek	8962 4259
Alice Springs	8951 7549

Disease Control fact sheets on various topics are available by contacting your nearest centre or from our web site at <http://www.nt.gov.au/health/cdc>

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