

Norovirus Fact Sheet

1. Norovirus is a common viral infection. It was previously known as Norwalk-like virus, and the disease it causes has also been referred to as viral gastroenteritis, winter vomiting disease, and 24-hour tummy bug.
2. Norovirus only affects humans. It can be spread directly from person to person by hand-mouth spread (faecal-oral), or indirectly via airborne transmission, contact with contaminated surfaces, or contaminated food or water.
3. Because the disease is highly infectious, norovirus often occurs in outbreaks.
4. Symptoms of norovirus can include nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, abdominal pain, muscle aches, headache, tiredness, and mild fever. Symptoms usually develop within 2 days of exposure to the virus.
5. The disease is usually self-limiting, with symptoms resolving in 24-48 hours. However, young children and the elderly and people with other illnesses may be more severely affected.
6. People with norovirus are infectious while they are unwell and for several days after diarrhoea stops.
7. The best ways to prevent spread of norovirus infection are:
 - Careful hand washing at all times after going to the toilet, changing nappies and before preparing food (20 seconds washing both sides of the hands with soap and running water, then 20 seconds drying).
 - If hands are not visibly dirty, alcohol hand gel is a useful alternative.
 - Keep sick people away from others. For norovirus, this means that a person who develops diarrhoea and/or vomiting should leave work or school immediately, and should avoid other people and avoid handling food until 48 hours after diarrhoea has resolved.
 - Clean contaminated surfaces such as toilets, bathrooms and other hard surfaces a sick person may have touched, with a dilute bleach solution.
 - It is particularly important for people who have had diarrhoea and vomiting to stay away from places where there are large numbers of other people. Infections can spread very quickly in institutions such as hospitals, rest homes, schools and hostels, or at any type of social gathering.
 - Contaminated food can also infect large numbers of people, and people who have had diarrhoea and/or vomiting should avoid handling food until 48 hours after diarrhoea has resolved.
8. People with diarrhoea and vomiting should drink plenty of fluids, preferably in the form of an electrolyte replacement solution (available from your chemist). If diarrhoea or vomiting persists, or there is concern about a sick person's condition, telephone your general practitioner or after hours service.
9. Organisations that suspect they have a Norovirus outbreak should contact Community and Public Health.

Dr Daniel Williams, Medical Officer of Health, South Canterbury District Health Board