



Norovirus

Norovirus, also known as viral gastroenteritis, causes inflammation of the stomach and intestines. It is often incorrectly called the “stomach flu,” although the influenza virus does not cause it. Illness can be serious, especially for young children and older adults.

School health and childcare provider information

Cause

Norovirus (previously known as calicivirus, Norwalk virus, or Norwalk-like virus).

Symptoms

Watery diarrhea and vomiting which may lead to dehydration. Low-grade fever, headache, muscle aches, fatigue, and stomach cramps can also occur. The illness can be mild to moderately severe with symptoms usually lasting 1 to 3 days, but children may have symptoms for up to 6 days. Children who are dehydrated may cry with no tears, urinate less than usual, and be sleepy or fussy.

Spread

Norovirus leaves the body through the stool of an infected person and enters another person when hands, food, or objects (such as toys) contaminated with stool are placed in the mouth. Spread can occur when people do not wash their hands after using the toilet or changing diapers. People can also get sick by eating food items contaminated during preparation or serving. Infections with norovirus may also occur when consuming raw shellfish from contaminated water. Aerosolized spread from vomiting is possible. Person-to-person spread often occurs within families, schools, nursing homes, cruise ships, childcare settings, and communities.

Incubation

It takes 12 to 48 hours from the time a person is exposed until symptoms develop.

Contagious period

Most contagious while symptoms are present and up to 72 hours after vomiting and/or diarrhea have stopped. The virus can be shed in the stool for more than 4 weeks after symptom resolution.

Exclusion

Childcare and school: Until 24 hours after diarrhea and vomiting have stopped.

Anyone with vomiting and/or diarrhea should not go in lakes, pools, splash pads, water parks, or hot tubs until after diarrhea and/or vomiting have stopped.

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Staff must avoid food preparation when diarrhea and/or vomiting are present and for at least 72 hours after diarrhea and/or vomiting have stopped. Call your local health department to determine how these restrictions apply.

Diagnosis

Diagnostic testing is available. Recommend parents/guardians call their health care provider if their child has symptoms to discuss whether laboratory tests need to be done to determine the cause.

Treatment

No specific treatment. Supportive therapy includes oral or intravenous rehydration solutions to replace and maintain fluid and electrolyte balance.

Prevention

- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and warm running water after using the toilet, changing diapers, and before preparing or eating food. **Thorough hand washing is the best way to prevent the spread of communicable diseases.** Staff should closely monitor handwashing of all children after they have used the bathroom or have been diapered.
- Clean and disinfect diapering area and potty chairs after each use. Clean and disinfect bathroom toilets, sinks, and toys at least daily and when soiled (see Section 2).
- Clean and sanitize mouthed toys, objects, and surfaces at least daily and when soiled (see Section 2). Wash soiled laundry in hot water and dry on the hottest setting.
- Avoid swallowing water when in lakes, pools, splash pads, water parks, or hot tubs.
- Do not eat raw or undercooked shellfish and wash fruit and vegetables.

For more information, call Hennepin County Epidemiology at 612-543-5230 or call your local health department.

