

# Norovirus Fact Sheet

## What is norovirus?

Norovirus is a very contagious and serious virus that causes your stomach or intestines, or both, to get inflamed, leading to stomach pain, nausea, diarrhea, and vomiting. It is the most common cause of foodborne-disease outbreaks in the United States.

## What are the signs and symptoms?

Norovirus causes acute gastroenteritis. The most common symptoms are:

- diarrhea
- throwing up
- nausea
- stomach pain

Other symptoms include fever, headache, and body aches. A person usually develops symptoms 12-48 hours after being exposed to norovirus. Most people with norovirus illness get better within 1 to 3 days.

## How do you get norovirus?

Norovirus can be found in your stool (feces) even before you start feeling sick, and can stay in your stool for 2 weeks or more after you feel better.

You can become infected with norovirus by accidentally getting stool or vomit from infected people in your mouth. This usually happens by

- eating food or drinking liquids that are contaminated with norovirus
- touching surfaces or objects contaminated with norovirus, then putting your fingers in your mouth
- having contact with someone who is infected with norovirus (for example, sharing food or eating utensils)

Norovirus can spread quickly in closed places like daycare centers, nursing homes, schools, and cruise ships.

## Norovirus and food

Most norovirus outbreaks occur in food service settings like restaurants. Infected food workers are frequently the source of the outbreaks, often by touching ready-to-eat foods, such as raw fruits and vegetables, with their bare hands before serving them. However, any food served raw or handled after being cooked can get contaminated with norovirus. Norovirus outbreaks can also occur from foods, such as oysters, fruits, and vegetables that are contaminated at their source.

## Can norovirus be treated?

There is no specific medicine to treat people with norovirus illness. Norovirus infection cannot be treated with antibiotics because it is a viral (not a bacterial) infection.

If you have norovirus illness, you should drink plenty of liquids to replace fluid lost from throwing up and diarrhea. This will help prevent dehydration, which can lead to serious problems. Sports drinks can help with mild dehydration. But, these drinks may not replace important nutrients and minerals.

## How can I prevent norovirus?

Practice proper hand hygiene. Wash your hands carefully with soap and water, especially after using the toilet and changing diapers, and always before eating, preparing, or handling food.

Always wash fruits and vegetables, and cook seafood thoroughly. Be aware that noroviruses are relatively resistant. They can survive temperatures as high as 140°F and quick steaming processes that are often used for cooking shellfish. Food that might be contaminated with norovirus should be thrown out.

Keep sick infants and children out of areas where food is being handled and prepared. You should not prepare food for others or provide healthcare while you are sick and for at least 2 days after symptoms stop.

Clean and disinfect contaminated surfaces. After throwing up or having diarrhea, immediately clean and disinfect contaminated surfaces. Use a chlorine bleach solution or other disinfectant registered as effective against norovirus by the EPA.

If you are experiencing a noro-like illness, we recommend you stay home until symptoms have resolved.

