

What is norovirus?

Noroviruses are a large group of viruses, also called small round viruses. Many of the viruses are named for the locale where they were first identified as causing an outbreak. Norovirus is the most common cause of foodborne illness (diarrhea and vomiting) in the U.S.

What are the symptoms of infection with norovirus?

The most common symptoms are nausea with vomiting, diarrhea, and cramps. People of all ages have these symptoms. Diarrhea is more common among adults; vomiting is more common in children. Many persons (25% to 50%) also experience headache, fever, chills and muscle aches. Illness usually lasts 24-48 hours. There are no known long-term effects.

How soon do symptoms appear?

The symptoms may appear 12 - 48 hours after exposure to the virus, but onset may range from 10-50 hours after exposure.

How is norovirus spread?

Norovirus are most commonly spread through the fecal-oral route, either by consumption of food or water contaminated with stool or by direct person-to-person spread. The virus can also be spread by contact with objects contaminated with stool and by spreading in the air after someone vomits. This may result in droplets landing on surfaces or entering the mouth and being swallowed.

Outbreaks of norovirus have been associated with both food and water. Food outbreaks have been linked to cold, prepared foods (salads, sandwiches) presumably contaminated by an infected food handler, or shellfish probably harvested from contaminated water. Outbreaks have also been associated with drinking water and recreational water (swimming ponds, beaches) where people have ingested contaminated water.

Noroviruses are also spread from person to person, especially among family members.

How long is a person infectious?

People can pass the virus to others while sick, and up to 72 hours after diarrhea has stopped.

How is norovirus diagnosed?

It is possible to confirm norovirus in the laboratory. Noroviruses are suspected as the cause of illness if:

1. Stool tests are negative for other causes.
2. Ill individuals have vomiting and/or diarrhea.
3. The average time between exposure and illness is 24 - 48 hours.
4. The duration of illness for most persons is 12 - 60 hours (usually 24 - 48)
5. A stool test is positive for norovirus.

What is the treatment for this illness?

There is no specific treatment for norovirus. Rest and staying away from other people is important while symptoms occur. Usually, illness does not last more than 2-3 days.

What can be done to help prevent the spread of these viruses?

It is best to identify the source of infection and remove the source (e.g. an infected food handler, contaminated food or water). Anyone who is ill with diarrhea, vomiting or fever should not work with food, the elderly, in healthcare or child care. Anyone working in these occupations that becomes ill with these

symptoms should leave work. Food recently prepared by this person should be discarded. Good handwashing should be encouraged at all times.