

Norovirus (norovirus infections)

Norovirus is a highly contagious intestinal disease caused by noroviruses. They are transmitted through human-to-human contact, contaminated food and water, or by touching contaminated surfaces. The virus causes inflammation of the stomach and/or intestines (acute gastroenteritis). The illness is also called 'stomach flu', although it is not caused by infection with influenza viruses.

The cause

Noroviruses (genus Norovirus, family Calicivirus) are a group of related, single-stranded RNA viruses without a membrane.

Incubation period

The time from infection to onset of disease is usually 24 to 48 hours. The onset of the disease may be sudden or develop gradually.

Transmission

Noroviruses are contracted by "faecal-oral" ("stool-to-mouth transmission"), by direct contact with faeces and/or vomit.

You can get infected by eating contaminated food and drinks, touching contaminated surfaces and through physical contact with infected people.

Noroviruses are often transmitted in day-care centres, schools, kindergartens, health care facilities, nursing homes and areas where large numbers of people are present.

Norovirus infections occur mainly during the winter months.

Susceptibility to infection

Susceptibility to infection is universal. There are several different virus subtypes. Resistance to a particular virus subtype does not mean that you cannot get sick from another subtype. Young children, older adults and people with chronic illnesses are the most susceptible to infection.

Symptoms of the disease

The most common symptoms of infection are diarrhoea, vomiting, nausea and stomach pain; patients may also have fever, headache and pain throughout the body. Vomiting is often the first or even the leading sign of the disease. Diarrhoea is watery and without traces of blood or mucus. In otherwise healthy people, the problem resolves within 12 to 60 hours. Infections are more severe in young children, the elderly and people undergoing hospital treatment.

Infectiousness

Norovirus can be present in the stool even before the first signs of illness appear. The virus may also remain present in the stool for 14 days or longer after the diarrhoea has stopped. The greatest chance of transmission is at the onset of the disease and during the first few days after recovery.

Treatment

There is no specific medicine to treat norovirus infections. Treatment is supportive and includes fluid and electrolyte replacement. Electrolyte replacement preparations are available in pharmacies.

Prevention of the disease

We prevent infections by:

- good hand hygiene (washing hands properly with soap and running water, especially after doing the washing up, changing nappies, before eating and before and during food preparation;
- washing fruit and vegetables or giving food sufficient heat treatment;
- we cleaning and disinfecting contaminated surfaces;
- keeping children who have diarrhoea or are vomiting home from nursery or school.

Additional documents:

- [Information on norovirus infections for the general public](#)
- [Prevention of norovirus infections in food handling](#)
- [Notification for a patient with norovirus infection in an establishment](#)