

PATIENT INFORMATION

The Facts about Norovirus

What is Norovirus?

Norovirus is caused by a virus that can only be seen under an electron microscope. It is highly infectious; it is seasonal and found more during the winter months. Norovirus is characterised by a sudden onset of diarrhoea and/or vomiting, and generally feeling unwell. Additional symptoms may include headache, abdominal pain, muscle pain, and in some cases a rise in temperature. Norovirus is a virus that has been known to cause outbreaks of gastroenteritis in healthcare premises, hotels, schools and cruise ships.

How is Norovirus spread?

When a person has profuse diarrhoea and/or vomiting due to Norovirus, viruses are released into the environment which then settle on surrounding surfaces. These viruses can then be transferred by hand to mouth after touching contaminated surfaces. The incubation period is usually 24-48 hours. Patients can be infectious to others for 24 hours after their diarrhoea and/or vomiting has stopped. The majority of patients have symptoms that last for 24-48 hours.

How is it treated?

There is no antibiotic treatment. We advise that you drink plenty, and rest until the symptoms subside. Good hand hygiene is also essential.

Will patients receive treatment from other departments?

Yes! Any investigations that are not urgent will be postponed until the outbreak is over. Where possible, investigations such as chest x-rays will be carried out on the ward. If requires urgent treatment, the department will be advised of the problem on the ward.

If the patient becomes unwell in the department contact Infection Prevention and Control Department/Community Infection Control Team for advice. Where possible place patients from affected areas, last on the list.

Visiting affected wards

Staff who must visit affected wards are asked to change into scrubs if they will be having patient contact. If the visit is to deliver stores, pharmacy mail then apron and gloves are required. Good hand hygiene with soap and water reducing your risk of acquiring Norovirus.

Transferring patients to other departments

Portering staff must wear apron and gloves for patient contact. If a patient becomes unwell when transferring to the department/ward infection control must be contacted.

Will I give Norovirus to relatives, friends and carers?

The risk of cross infection is high, and is mainly through hand to mouth contact. Risk can be reduced significantly by good hand hygiene by staff, patients and visitors, including hand washing:

- When entering and leaving the ward area.
- After using the toilet or toileting others.
- Before eating.

Where possible ward visits from the very young or frail should be avoided. Any relatives, friends or carers who have diarrhoea and/or vomiting must not visit until they have been clear of symptoms for 72 hours. If they have diarrhoea and/or vomiting during their visit, they must tell a member of staff.

How is it spread to other patients?

Norovirus is a fast spreading virus. Isolation in single rooms and good hand hygiene may reduce the spread. However during an outbreak the whole ward may be closed to admissions.

Why is the ward closed to admissions?

In healthcare settings, when the environment becomes contaminated, it is necessary to close the ward until the patients' diarrhoea and/or vomiting have stopped. The ward is thoroughly cleaned before it is reopened. This is to stop new patients catching Norovirus and continuing the cycle.

When will the ward re-open?

Until 72 hours after the last person has had diarrhoea and/or vomiting, the ward will be completely closed. Once the ward has been thoroughly deep cleaned it will be re-opened.

Reference:

Guidelines for the management of norovirus outbreaks in acute and community health and social care settings. Produced by the Norovirus Working Party: an equal partnership of professional organisations for UKHSA March 2012.

http://www.hpa.org.uk/webc/hpawebfile/hpaweb_c/1317131639453

For further assistance or to receive this information in a different format, please contact the department which created this leaflet.

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