

Norovirus

Frequently Asked Questions



What is Norovirus?

Norovirus is a virus that causes the “stomach flu” or gastroenteritis. Although norovirus is called the “stomach flu” it is a completely different illness than influenza or the “flu”.

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms of norovirus can include:

- Vomiting (children often vomit more)
- Headache
- Nausea
- Stomach cramps
- Diarrhea
- General feeling of tiredness
- Low-grade fever

How does it spread?

Norovirus can be easily spread from person-to-person through direct contact, contact with contaminated surfaces or by consuming contaminated food or drinks. Only a few virus particles can cause illness and the virus can survive on surfaces for weeks. Contamination of food and drink may occur when infected individuals handle food or beverages, leading to many infections among individuals who consume those products.

Who is at risk of developing norovirus?

Anyone can get norovirus. Because it is so easily spread, people in institutions such as long term care facilities and schools have a greater chance for exposure.

How is it diagnosed and treated?

While there is no specific treatment for norovirus, supportive therapy can include drinking plenty of fluids, rest, and antiemetics (a drug used to treat nausea and vomiting). In more severe cases, hospitalization is sometimes required to receive intravenous fluids to prevent dehydration.

What should I do if I think I have it?

If you think you have norovirus, you should contact your doctor, and discuss your symptoms.

How is it prevented?

- Good hand washing is the best way to prevent norovirus. Be sure to wash hands frequently with soap and water especially before and after food preparation, and after changing diapers or going to the bathroom.
- Frequently clean commonly touched surfaces, such as doorknobs and railings, with a fresh mixture of bleach and water (1 ½ cups bleach per gallon of water).
- If you are sick with symptoms of norovirus, stay home for 3 days after you recover, especially if you work in healthcare, as a food handler, or at a daycare facility.
- Dirty clothing can be washed in hot, soapy water.
- Towels used to clean vomit or stool should be thrown away in plastic bags or washed in hot, soapy water.

For more information contact your doctor, refer to <http://www.phila.gov/Health/> or contact the Philadelphia Department of Public Health, Division of Disease Control at 215-685-6740.

