

NOROVIRUS FACT SHEET

What is viral gastroenteritis?

Gastroenteritis means inflammation of the stomach and small and large intestines. Some people refer to it as the “stomach flu”. This illness is not the same as seasonal flu that causes infection in your lungs.

What causes viral gastroenteritis?

Viral gastroenteritis is an infection caused by a variety of viruses that cause vomiting or diarrhea. Many different viruses can cause an upset stomach resulting in vomiting and diarrhea. Included among these viruses are rotaviruses, noroviruses, adenoviruses and others.

What is norovirus?

Noroviruses are a common cause of stomach illness and are very contagious. They commonly cause outbreaks in such settings as restaurants, catered events, cruise ships, schools, and nursing homes.

What are the symptoms of norovirus?

The main symptoms are watery diarrhea and vomiting. The affected person may also have headache, stomachache, body aches and sometimes fever. Symptoms usually begin 24-48 hours after exposure and last one to two days, but can last longer.

Is norovirus serious?

People who get viral gastroenteritis almost always recover completely without any long-term problems. It is more serious for infants, young children and the elderly. These groups have difficulty replacing body fluids lost due to vomiting and diarrhea. Anyone experiencing severe symptoms and are at risk for dehydration should contact their health care provider for evaluation and additional advice.

Is norovirus contagious? How is it spread?

Persons with this illness need to stay home until they are symptom free for 2 days (48 hours). Food handlers should remain home for 3 days (72 hours) after becoming symptom free. The viruses that cause gastroenteritis are spread through close contact with infected persons (through their feces and vomit). Food and water may be contaminated by food preparers or handlers who have viral gastroenteritis, especially if they do not wash their hands regularly after using the bathroom. Thorough handwashing and the exclusion of sick individuals are very important.

Can norovirus (and other viral gastroenteritis) be prevented?

You can reduce your chances of getting sick by following these simple guidelines:

- **Frequent handwashing with soap and water** (especially after using the bathroom and before handling food)—**alcohol-based hand cleaners do not kill Norovirus.**
- Prompt disinfection of contaminated surfaces with a freshly prepared bleach solution (1/3 cup bleach to 1 gallon water). When vomiting has occurred, immediately close off the area and disinfect all surfaces within a 25 foot radius. Discard any food that was in the area.
- Wear gloves when cleaning soiled surfaces.
- Wash soiled clothing and linens as soon as possible.
- Do not swim in a pool or any recreational water if you’ve recently had a diarrheal illness.

- Stay home during illness and for at least 2 days (48 hours) after your symptoms have resolved.
- Food handlers should stay home during illness and for at least 3 days (72 hours) after their symptoms have resolved.

For more information please contact Contra Costa Public Health at 925-313-6740 and visit our website at <http://cchealth.org/norovirus/>