



Island County Public Health

Communicable Disease Program

Norovirus

You are being provided with this fact sheet:

- ☐ **because you or your child may have been exposed to norovirus.** If you believe your child has norovirus contact your healthcare provider. Notify your childcare provider or school if a diagnosis of norovirus is made.
- ☐ **for informational purposes only.**

What is norovirus?

Norovirus is a very contagious virus that causes vomiting and diarrhea. Anyone can get infected and sick with norovirus. It is sometimes called the “stomach flu” or “stomach bug”. However, norovirus illness is not related to the flu, which is caused by the influenza virus. It is also commonly called “food poisoning” as it may be spread when food is improperly cooked or handled by someone who has the virus.

What are symptoms of norovirus?

Symptoms often consist of explosive vomiting and/or watery diarrhea with cramps that occur frequently and last 1-3 days. Low grade fever, chills, and body aches can also sometimes accompany the illness. Symptoms usually appear 12-48 hours after being exposed to the virus, and most people feel better within 24-72 hours.

Dehydration may occur, especially in young children. Symptoms of dehydration include decreased urination, dry mouth and throat, feeling dizzy when standing up, and/or crying with few or no tears and unusual sleepiness or fussiness.

How is norovirus spread?

Norovirus spreads through stool (poop, feces) and vomit of infected people. It spreads when someone gets the virus in their mouth, such as when:

- An infected person does not wash hands properly and contaminates food that others eat.
- A person touches surfaces or objects contaminated with norovirus and then eats or puts their fingers in their mouth before washing hands.

The virus can also become aerosolized (travel in the air) when people vomit. People can spread norovirus before they start to feel sick, and they are most contagious when they have symptoms. Norovirus can spread as long as two weeks or more after symptoms end.

How is norovirus treated?

There is no specific treatment available for norovirus. Neither antibiotics nor antivirals are effective in treating norovirus. Most people recover by resting and staying hydrated. People with norovirus illness should prevent dehydration by drinking plenty of liquids to replace fluid lost from vomiting and diarrhea. Oral rehydration fluids, sports drinks, and other beverages without caffeine or alcohol can help with mild dehydration, although they may not replace important nutrients and minerals.

Dehydration can become a serious concern if a person cannot keep down water or other liquids or are having severe diarrhea. Those at increased risk include infants and young children, the elderly, and people with existing health problems. If a person shows signs of dehydration, they may need medical attention.

How can the spread of norovirus be prevented?

- Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Hand sanitizer **does not** work well against norovirus. Hand sanitizers can be used in addition to hand washing but is not a substitute. Wash hands, especially:
 - After using the toilet or changing diapers.
 - Before eating, preparing, or handling food.
 - Before giving yourself or someone else medicine.
- Routinely clean and disinfect kitchens and commonly touched surfaces.
- Follow these steps for cleaning and disinfecting surfaces after someone vomits or has diarrhea:
 - Wear disposable gloves and wipe with paper towels, then throw gloves and paper towels in trash.
 - Disinfect area with product as directed on label. Use a diluted solution of chlorine bleach and water or an [EPA-registered disinfecting product against norovirus](#).
 - Clean area again with soap and hot water.
 - Wash laundry items with hot water and dry on highest heat setting.
 - Take out trash and wash hands after removing gloves.
- Do not allow anyone with norovirus symptoms to prepare food while sick and at least **72 hours after** their last episode of vomiting and/or diarrhea.

When does a child need to stay home from childcare or school?

Any person who has 2 or more loose stools (diarrhea) or have vomited 2 or more times, within a 24-hour period needs to be excluded until at least 24 hours, and preferably 48 hours, after symptoms end. Policies may vary by school or childcare facility.

A child should not attend childcare or school if one or more of the following applies:

- Fever (defined as temperature above 100.4°F)
- Does not feel well enough to participate in classroom activities

Adapted from materials developed by Snohomish County Health Department and Public Health — Seattle & King County.

References

- Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, Norovirus: <https://www.cdc.gov/norovirus/index.html>
- Washington State Department of Health, Norovirus: <https://doh.wa.gov/you-and-your-family/illness-and-disease-z/norovirus>
- Public Health – Seattle & King County, Norovirus: <https://kingcounty.gov/en/legacy/depts/health/communicable-diseases/disease-control/norovirus.aspx>
- Child Care Health Program – Public Health Seattle & King County: <https://kingcounty.gov/depts/health/child-teen-health/child-care-health/disease-prevention.aspx>
- Child Care Health Outreach – Snohomish County Health Department: <https://www.snohd.org/446/Disease-Fact-Sheets-for-Child-Care-Provi>

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