

Norovirus

This leaflet offers more information about Norovirus. If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to the staff member in charge of your care.

What is Norovirus?

Norovirus is the most common cause of gastro-intestinal (gut) infection in the UK. Gastro-intestinal infections are also known as “tummy bugs”. Norovirus is much more common than other well-known gastro-intestinal infections such as Salmonella. It only affects humans and there are up to one million cases of it every year in the UK. There is usually a peak of infection in the winter, which is why it is sometimes known as “winter-vomiting infection”.

What are the symptoms?

The incubation period is usually 24 to 72 hours. This is the time between getting the virus and experiencing the symptoms.

The symptoms include:

- feeling sick
- projectile vomiting (often sudden and severe)
- diarrhoea.

Although this is an unpleasant disease, it is rarely dangerous for healthy people. However it may be more serious for unwell patients already in hospital. Usually symptoms last for up to two days and most people make a full and speedy recovery. In most cases no treatment is required, but it is sensible to drink plenty of clear fluid (such as water) as soon as the vomiting has stopped, to avoid dehydration.

How is it spread?

Norovirus is spread extremely easily from one person to another (rather like the common cold). We cannot see the virus so it is important to understand how we can get it. Spread can happen through:

- not washing hands after using the toilet
- being exposed to the virus in the vomit and diarrhoea of someone who is infected
- touching surfaces (such as furniture or other people’s hands) that have the virus on them
- spray from vomit or diarrhoea
- eating contaminated food, such as food left uncovered in the vicinity.

Only a few virus particles are needed to cause illness in a susceptible person.

As a result, infection can easily spread in areas where there are large numbers of people such as schools, nursing homes, hospitals, hotels and cruise ships.

The infection is often acquired in the community and brought into the hospital when patients are admitted.

People remain infectious for up to 48 hours after symptoms have finished.

How can we prevent it?

Because the virus spreads so quickly and easily, not all infections can be prevented. However, the following measures will reduce the chance of it spreading.

1. **Good hand washing** with liquid soap and water is the key to the prevention of Norovirus infection. Hands must be washed before handling food, before eating and after visiting the toilet. Anyone with diarrhoea should not prepare or handle food for others.

Hand rub/gel does not kill Norovirus, (it may be used directly after washing hands).

2. **Cleaning surfaces**

The virus can remain alive for days on floors and surfaces so vomit or diarrhoea should be cleaned up straightaway. Staff will clean with Chlor-Clean (diluted bleach) or chlorine wipes, in these circumstances. Bays will be deep cleaned and curtains changed.

3. **Isolating people with the virus**

If possible, patients with Norovirus are nursed in isolation in a side room or nursed with other Norovirus patients in the same bay. We close the ward or bay to new patient admissions and transfers out when we have confirmed or suspected Norovirus on a ward.

Visitors

Other important measures to prevent the infection spreading may include restricting visiting. This may mean that only very close relatives may visit. Even then it is only with the permission of the nurse in charge. If you are visiting a ward where there are cases of Norovirus you are at risk of getting the infection.

Remember these main points

- Norovirus causes diarrhoea and vomiting
- It spreads easily
- It is rarely serious but symptoms can last up to two days

- Hand washing with soap and water and isolation are essential to prevent infection
- Do not visit if you have symptoms of diarrhoea and/or vomiting
- Wash and dry hands when you arrive and leave the ward.

Any questions?

If you need any further information or advice please ask the nurse in charge on the ward or your GP.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about Norovirus, please contact Infection Prevention and Control on 020 8725 2459 (Monday to Friday, 8.00am to 5.00pm).

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.stgeorges.nhs.uk

Additional services

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS can offer you on-the-spot advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or the care you have received. You can visit the PALS office between 9.30am and 4.30pm, Monday to Friday in the main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough wings (near the lift foyer).

Tel: 020 8725 2453 **Email:** pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk

NHS Choices

NHS Choices provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health. **Web:** www.nhs.uk

NHS 111

You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones. **Tel:** 111

AccessAble

You can download accessibility guides for all of our services by searching 'St George's Hospital' on the AccessAble website (www.accessable.co.uk). The guides are designed to ensure everyone – including those with accessibility needs – can access our hospital and community sites with confidence.

