

Norovirus

This leaflet gives information about Norovirus. If you have any questions, please speak to the staff member looking after you.

What is Norovirus?

Norovirus is a virus that causes diarrhoea and/or vomiting. It is sometimes called the “winter vomiting bug” because it is more common in winter, but it can occur at any time of year. Norovirus is the most common cause of gut infection in the UK. It only affects humans and can affect people of any age. After you have had norovirus, you only develop short-term immunity. This means you can get it again the future.

How does it spread?

Norovirus spreads very easily from person to person. It can spread if you come into contact with stool or vomit from someone who has the infection, if you touch surfaces or objects have the virus on them (such as door handles, toilets, furniture, or patient equipment), or if tiny droplets from vomit get into the air and are swallowed. It can also spread by eating contaminated food, for example food that has been left uncovered. Only a very small amount of the virus is needed to cause infection. Norovirus can spread quickly, particularly in places where many people are close together, such as schools, nursing homes, hospitals, hotels, and cruise ships. Outbreaks commonly occur both in the community and in hospitals. People can remain infectious for up to 48 to 72 hours after their symptoms have stopped.

What are the signs and symptoms?

The most common symptoms of norovirus are vomiting (which may be sudden) and diarrhoea. Symptoms can also include nausea, abdominal pain, diarrhoea, fever headache and muscle pain. These can happen on their own or together.

Do I need any tests to confirm the diagnosis?

If norovirus is suspected, a stool sample may be sent to the laboratory to confirm the diagnosis. Sometimes norovirus can be diagnosed based on your symptoms alone.

What happens if my result is positive?

If you have diarrhoea and/or vomiting and norovirus is suspected or confirmed, you may be cared for in a single room, or in a bay with other affected patients. You will need to remain in this room or bay until everyone has fully recovered. It is important to wash your hands with soap and water (or use hand hygiene wipes if you need support) after using the toilet or commode, and before eating or drinking. Staff will wear disposable gloves and plastic

aprons when caring for you. They will wash their hands regularly with soap and water, as alcohol hand rub does not kill norovirus.

What is the treatment or management of norovirus?

There is no specific treatment for norovirus. Although it is unpleasant, it is a self-limiting illness and is very rarely dangerous. Drink plenty of fluids to avoid dehydration and try to get plenty of rest.

How can I protect others/ prevent spread?

Good hand washing is the most important way to prevent norovirus. Wash your hands with soap and water, especially before handling food and after using the toilet. Alcohol hand rub does not kill norovirus, so soap and water is essential. Anyone who has diarrhoea should not prepare or handle food for others. Norovirus can live on floors and other surfaces for several days, so it is important to clean up vomit and diarrhoea properly using a disinfectant that contains bleach. Your room and surrounding surfaces should be kept tidy to allow thorough cleaning to be carried out thoroughly at least twice a day.

Can I have visitors?

While you have symptoms of diarrhoea and/or vomiting and norovirus is suspected or confirmed, visitors should be limited to essential visiting only, with no more than two visitors at your bedside at one time. Visitors should wash their hands with soap and water before and after touching you or your surroundings, and again when leaving the ward. They do not need to wear gloves or aprons unless they are helping with your personal care. Visitors must sit on the chairs provided and should not sit on your bed. They must also use public toilets, not the toilet in your room, if needed. If visitors have symptoms of diarrhoea and/or vomiting, they must not visit until they are fully recovered and have been symptom free for at least 48 hours.

Effects of a norovirus outbreak in a hospital.

An outbreak may be declared when several patients in the same area are suspected or confirmed to have norovirus. To help contain an outbreak, affected bays or wards may be closed to new admissions to prevent the virus spreading to newly admitted patients. In addition, discharge to other healthcare facilities, such as hospitals or care homes, may be delayed until the area is clear of infection. Patients who are well enough can still be discharged home.

Contact us

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

Additional services

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS can offer you advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or care.

Tel: St Helier 020 8296 2508 / Epsom 01372 735243/ St. Georges 020 8725 2453

Email: ESTH est-tr.PALS@nhs.net / St Georges pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk

NHS UK

The NHS 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.



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