
What is Norovirus?

Outbreaks of Norovirus (NV) infection are reported frequently. Most outbreaks occur in closed or semi-closed communities, especially hospitals, nursing homes and leisure industry settings such as hotels, holiday and caravan camps, and coach parties.

NV was previously called Small Round Structured Virus (SRSV) or Norwalk-like virus (NLV) and causes what many people still call 'Winter Vomiting Disease' although it can occur at any time of year.

What are the symptoms?

The most common symptom is vomiting, which can be very violent. This usually starts between 10 and 50 hours after picking up the virus. Other symptoms include:

- ❖ Nausea (feeling sick)
- ❖ Diarrhoea
- ❖ Headache
- ❖ Fever
- ❖ Muscle aches

The illness is generally mild and short lived, (12-72 hours) though people with long term medical conditions may develop more serious symptoms.

How does it spread?

NV is highly infectious. Only small amounts of virus are needed to cause infection by the following routes:

❖ Breathing in the Virus

NV maybe spread from the vomit of a sick person. When sudden projectile vomiting occurs, a fine mist of virus particles passes into the air, which can be breathed in by people in the immediate area.

❖ Hand to Mouth Contact

Surfaces may be contaminated directly by vomit or by the fine mist of virus particles produced during projectile vomiting. Similar spread can occur from diarrhoea although the main risk here is via the toilet areas. Infection occurs when a person touches a contaminated surface, tap, toilet flush handle etc then has hand to mouth contact without first washing their hands.

❖ Contaminated Food and Utensils

Food and utensils (e.g. place settings) in the area of a vomiting incident and food or utensils, which have been handled by infected staff that have not washed their hands, can be a source of spread of the virus.

❖ Direct Person to Person

Less common – usually requires intimate contact.

Who is at risk?

Anyone can get the infection but the very young and old can suffer most.

Anyone who has had diarrhoea or vomiting should not visit elderly people at home, care homes or hospitals until they have been free from symptoms for 48 hours.

Can it be prevented?

Careful handwashing with warm water, liquid soap and individual towels is the most important control measure. Hands need to be washed thoroughly after:

- ❖ Cleaning
- ❖ Using the toilet
- ❖ Before and after serving food
- ❖ Handling linen
- ❖ Assisting ill guests, residents or patients

In some instances it may be necessary to consider isolation of cases in order to bring the outbreak under control. Anyone with symptoms should be encouraged to stay confined in their rooms until they are well. This will usually be until 24 hours after the symptoms stop. If a relative or friend is in a hospital ward or home where there is an outbreak of NV it would be best to:

- ❖ Keep visits to a minimum
- ❖ Don't visit more than one person
- ❖ Keep children under 5 away
- ❖ Don't eat or drink during a visit
- ❖ Wash hands regularly – especially before and leaving the room

What is the best home care advice?

If someone has NV it is helpful to do the following:

- ❖ Throw out unwrapped food not to be peeled or cooked that has been within 2 metres of vomit spill
- ❖ Anyone with symptoms should not handle or prepare food for others until 48 hours after symptoms stop
- ❖ Open windows or use an extractor fan before cleaning
- ❖ Wear disposable gloves (or household rubber gloves) when clearing up body fluid spills
- ❖ Clean up any diarrhoea or vomit immediately
- ❖ Flush solid material down the toilet or double wrap in plastic bag sacks for the domestic waste
- ❖ Clean hand basins, carpets and soft furnishings within a 2 metre area around a vomit spill with warm water and liquid detergent
- ❖ Clean hard surfaces (including taps, door knobs, toilet flush handle and seat) as above followed by diluted bleach solution (follow manufacturers instructions)
- ❖ Don't hand wash visibly soiled clothing or bedding

How is it treated?

Treatment in most cases requires drinking more fluids than usual but some people may wish to seek medical advice.

Need further advice or information?

- ❖ NHS Inform www.nhsinform.co.uk
- ❖ NHS24 ☎ 111 www.nhs24.co.uk
- ❖ www.nhsborders.scot.nhs.uk
- ❖ Local health clinic or GP

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June 2014