

QUICK FACTS: NOROVIRUS

Often called “food poisoning” or “stomach flu,” typical symptoms include cramping, diarrhea, vomiting, and stomach pain.

Wash Up and Stay Down – Preventing the Spread

To prevent infection and spread of norovirus always wash your hands with soap and water:

Running Water + Soap + Friction = Clean Hands. The most important food safety action you can take is just washing up before and after touching food.

Are you sick? Don't prepare food or care for others. During your illness and at least 2-3 days after your recovery you're still highly contagious. This is especially important for workers in schools, daycares, food establishments, and other places where they may expose people to norovirus. Keep sick infants and children out of areas where food is being handled and prepared. Foods that might be contaminated should be thrown out.

Rinse your produce. Fruits and veggies are not naturally clean and may contain harmful germs from the soil and water in which it grows. It can also get dirty during transport, storage, and handling from the warehouse to the point of sale.

Cook your seafood thoroughly. Oysters and shellfish must be cooked thoroughly before eating. Noroviruses are relatively resistant and able to survive quick steaming processes that are often used for cooking shellfish, as well as temperatures as high as 140°F (60°C).

Clean and disinfect contaminated surfaces after throwing up or having diarrhea. Use a chlorine bleach solution with a concentration of 1000-5000 ppm (5-25 tablespoons of household bleach per gallon of water). Or an EPA-registered norovirus disinfectant.

Wash laundry a maximum cycle with detergent and machine dry. Remove and wash clothes or linens that may be contaminated with vomit or feces. Wear gloves and handle contaminated items to avoid dispersal of the virus into the air.

Everyone's Game: There are many types of norovirus, so you can get infected and sick many times in your life. The Centers for Disease Control estimates there are 19 to 21 million cases every year. Average incubation is 12-48 hours. Symptoms typically resolve within 1-3 days in healthy persons.

Seriously: Vulnerable populations like the elderly, young children and those with compromised immune systems are particularly susceptible. Each year norovirus causes about 70,000 hospitalizations and 800 deaths, mostly in young children and the elderly. Norovirus is relatively stable in the environment and can survive freezing and heating to 140°F. It can survive on surfaces for prolonged periods of time. Care settings that have established norovirus policies and guidelines are better equipped when an outbreak occurs.

Easy Spreads: People with norovirus illness shed billions of virus particles in their stool and vomit and can easily infect others. You are most contagious from the moment you start feeling ill to the first 3 days after your recovery. Norovirus can spread quickly in closed places like daycares, nursing homes, schools, and cruise ships. It can be spread by eating and drinking contaminated foods and liquids, touching surfaces or objects that are contaminated and then putting your fingers in your mouth, and by having close personal contact with an infected person.

There are drugs for that, right? No. There is no vaccine for norovirus prevention and since antibiotics do not work on viruses, they won't work on norovirus. Dehydration is the most common complication, which is treated best with fluid replacement.

