



# Norovirus

(formerly Norwalk Agent)

## What is Norovirus?

Noroviruses are very small viruses that are often difficult to detect. They are responsible for more than 90 per cent of outbreaks of viral gastroenteritis and approximately 50 per cent of all cases cause outbreaks in both children and adults around the world.

Outbreaks of norovirus infection often occur in closed or semi-closed communities, such as long-term care homes, overnight camps, hospitals, prisons, dormitories, and cruise ships where the infection spreads very rapidly either by person-to-person transmission or through contaminated food. Many norovirus outbreaks have been traced to food that was handled by one infected person. Outbreaks have also been linked to banquets, swimming pools, schools and restaurants. The illness can occur year round, but is more common in the fall and winter.

## Symptoms of Norovirus

- Sudden onset of watery non-bacterial diarrhea
- Vomiting
- Cramps
- Headache
- Fever and chills
- Sore throat

These symptoms usually appear 24 to 48 hours after having contact with the virus. The illness commonly lasts 24 to 48 hours. Immunity against the virus can last up to 14 weeks.

## Norovirus spreads

Noroviruses are very contagious and infect humans through contact from infected people or contaminated food or water. As few as 10 viral particles are needed to cause illness. The virus is passed in stool and in vomit. The virus can become air borne by a toilet flush when vomit or diarrhea is present. Infection can also follow by eating food or breathing air near an infected person who is vomiting. Outbreaks have been linked to sick food handlers, contaminated shellfish, or water contaminated with sewage. The source of waterborne outbreaks may include water from municipal supplies, wells, recreational lakes, swimming pools and ice machines.

For further information, please call:  
**York Region Health Connection 1-800-361-5653**  
**TTY 1-866-252-9933 or visit [www.york.ca](http://www.york.ca)**

The virus continues to be shed after symptoms have subsided and shedding can still be detected many weeks after infection. Norovirus is rapidly killed by either sufficient heating or by chlorine-based disinfectants.

## Preventing Norovirus

There is no specific treatment for norovirus infections. Persons who are severely dehydrated may need rehydration therapy.

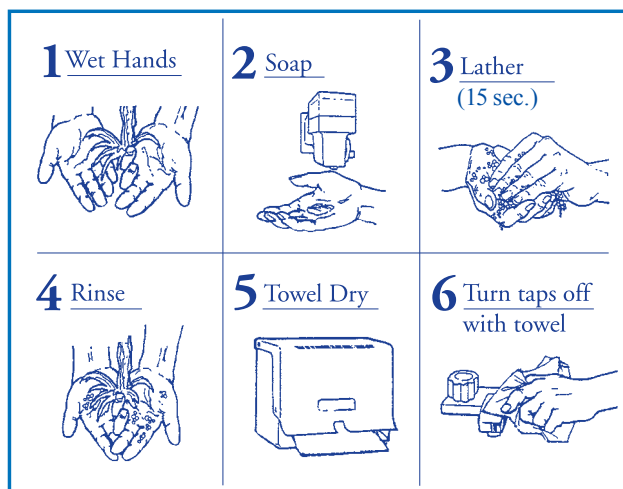
## Treating Norovirus

The best prevention is thorough hand washing:

- Wash hands thoroughly after using the washroom, handling diapers, and before preparing or eating food
- In long-term care facilities, encourage visitors to wash their hands before and after visiting

Other measures include:

- Isolating people who are ill with diarrhea and Norwalk-like symptoms from others
- In institutions, isolating ill residents from group activities until they are symptom-free for 48 hours. Ill staff should also remain off work until they are symptom-free for 48 hours.
- Carefully disposing of stool and stool contaminated material (e.g., soiled diapers)
- Cleaning and sanitizing washrooms and all hand contact surfaces daily or as needed
- Avoiding drinking untreated water
- Cooking shellfish thoroughly before eating



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