

NOROVIRUS

What is norovirus?

Norovirus is a very contagious virus that causes gastroenteritis, which is an inflammation of the stomach and intestines. It leads to symptoms like vomiting, diarrhea and stomach cramps. Even small amounts of the virus can cause infection.

Norovirus is often called the “stomach flu,” although it’s not related to the flu (influenza). It is the most common cause of gastroenteritis outbreaks worldwide, especially in places like schools, restaurants, cruise ships and long-term care homes.

Outbreaks can happen any time of year but are more common in fall and winter.

What are the symptoms of norovirus?

Symptoms usually appear 12 to 48 hours after exposure and may include:

- Vomiting
- Sudden onset of watery diarrhea
- Nausea
- Stomach cramps
- Headache
- Low-grade fever
- Muscle aches
- Fatigue

Most people recover in one to three days, but dehydration can be a concern, especially for young children, older adults and people with other health conditions.

How does norovirus spread?

Norovirus spreads easily and quickly, especially in crowded places. It is mainly spread through:

- Direct contact with an infected person, such as shaking hands
- Touching contaminated surfaces and then touching your mouth
- Eating or drinking contaminated food or water
- Cleaning up vomit or diarrhea without proper protection

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People are most contagious while they are sick and can continue to spread the virus for up to two weeks after symptoms stop.

How can norovirus be prevented?

To help prevent the spread of norovirus:

Personal Hygiene

- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water, especially after using the toilet, changing diapers, and before handling food
- Stay home if you're sick, and wait at least 48 hours after symptoms stop before returning to work or school

Cleaning and Disinfection

- Wear gloves when cleaning up vomit or diarrhea
- Clean surfaces with soap and water, then disinfect using a bleach solution:
 - Mix one cup (250 mL) of bleach with nine cups (2.25 L) of water
- Wash contaminated clothes and linens with hot water and detergent

Food Safety

- Avoid preparing food if you're sick or recovering from norovirus
- Wash fruits and vegetables with clean water
- Cook shellfish thoroughly before eating
- Avoid drinking untreated water

Environmental Measures

- Clean and sanitize bathrooms and frequently touched surfaces daily or as needed
- Dispose of soiled diapers and contaminated materials properly

How is norovirus treated?

There is no specific medicine to treat norovirus. Most people recover on their own. Treatment focuses on rest and staying hydrated by drinking water, oral rehydration solutions, or clear fluids.

Seek medical attention if symptoms become more severe or you are experiencing dehydration.