

Fact sheet

Norovirus

What is norovirus?

Norovirus is a viral infection, and a common cause of diarrhea and vomiting in the United States. Norovirus is highly contagious and spreads quickly. People infected with the virus can shed billions of norovirus particles, and only a few virus particles can make other people sick.

How is norovirus spread?

It is found in the vomit and stool of infected people and is transmitted by:

- Having direct physical contact with someone who is infected with norovirus, i.e., caring for or shaking hands with an ill person and then touching your hands to your mouth,
- Eating food or drinking liquids that are contaminated with norovirus, and
- Touching surfaces or objects with norovirus on them and then putting your hands in your mouth.

What are the signs and symptoms of norovirus?

- Diarrhea
- Vomiting
- Nausea
- Stomach pain
- Fever
- Headache
- Body aches

You may continue to shed virus in your feces

for up to 2 weeks after recovery. Viral shedding may last several weeks to several months if you have an underlying health condition. Some people with norovirus infection may show no signs or symptoms. However, they are still contagious and can spread the virus to others.

How long after infection do symptoms appear?

Diarrhea, abdominal pain and vomiting typically begin 12 to 48 hours after exposure. Symptoms last one to three days, and most people recover completely without treatment. However, for some people —especially infants, older adults and people with underlying disease — vomiting and diarrhea can be severely dehydrating and require medical attention.

Who is most at risk?

Young children, elderly people and people with other illnesses are more likely to suffer from severe infections. Risk factors include:

- Eating in a place where food is handled with unsanitary procedures,
- Attending preschool or a childcare center,
- Living in close quarters, such as in nursing homes,
- Staying in hotels, resorts, cruise ships or other destinations with many people in close quarters,
- Having contact with someone who has norovirus infection.

What type of health problems are caused by norovirus?

If you have norovirus illness, you can feel extremely ill, and vomit or have diarrhea many times a day. This can lead to dehydration.

Symptoms of dehydration include:

- Decrease in urination
- Dry mouth and throat
- Feeling dizzy when standing up.

Children who are dehydrated may cry with few or no tears and be unusually sleepy or fussy.

How is norovirus diagnosed?

Diagnosis is usually based on your symptoms, but norovirus can be identified by testing a stool sample. If you have a weakened immune system or other health problems, your healthcare provider may recommend a stool test to confirm the presence of norovirus.

How is norovirus treated?

There is currently no vaccine to prevent norovirus or specific treatment to treat norovirus illness. Recovery generally depends on the health of your immune system. It is important to replace lost fluids. If you're unable to drink enough fluids to prevent dehydration, you may need to be hospitalized to receive fluids.

How can norovirus be prevented?

- Stay home when sick for at least 24 hours after symptoms stop,
- Wash hands frequently with soap and water,
- Clean and disinfect contaminated surfaces using a bleach-based cleaner,
- Wash laundry contaminated with stool or vomit, and
- Avoid preparing food or caring for others when sick and for at least 2 days after symptoms stop.

Can a person get norovirus more than once?

Yes. You can get norovirus illness many times in your life because there are many different types of noroviruses. Infection with one type of norovirus may not protect you against other types. It is possible to develop immunity (protection) to specific types. But, it is not known exactly how long immunity lasts.

Where can I get more information?

- Your personal healthcare provider
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](https://www.cdc.gov/)
- [Utah Department of Health and Human Services](https://health.utah.gov/)
- [Cleaning up after someone with norovirus](#)

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