

## How is Norovirus and other viral gastroenteritis treated?

There is no specific treatment, apart from letting the illness run its course. It is important to drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration. This is particularly important for young children and the elderly.

## If I am suffering from Norovirus or other viral gastroenteritis, how can I prevent others from becoming infected?

Good hygiene is important in preventing others from becoming infected – this includes thorough hand washing with soap and water before and after contact with others and after using the toilet.

Soap and water is more effective against the viruses than alcohol gel, when cleaning your hands.

Food preparation should be avoided until 48 hours after symptoms have gone altogether.

**You should report any diarrhoea and/or vomiting to staff immediately if you are in hospital.**

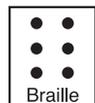
**For more information speak to a member of the clinical team, alternatively you can contact the Infection Prevention and Control Team on 02380 874291.**

**Additional information is available via the Department of Health website and link: [www.dh.gov.uk](http://www.dh.gov.uk)**

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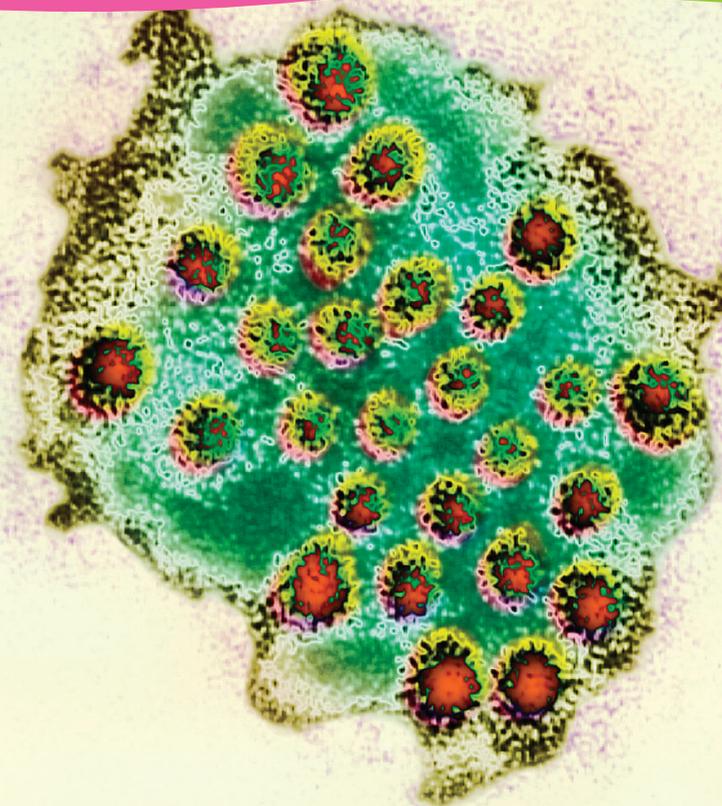
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Quality care, when and where you need it

# Gastroenteritis caused by Norovirus and other viruses: Fact sheet

Information for patients, visitors and relatives



## What is viral gastroenteritis?

An infection of the gut (intestines) which usually causes vomiting and/or diarrhoea. It is most commonly caused by Norovirus, other small round structured viruses or Rotavirus.

## What is Norovirus?

The most common cause of gastroenteritis (stomach bugs) also called “winter vomiting virus or Norwalk-like virus. It is estimated that Norovirus affects between 600 thousand and a million people in the UK each year, most of these are people in their own homes.

This virus is responsible for causing outbreaks of gastroenteritis in institutions like hospitals, residential/nursing homes, schools and cruise ships.

## How is viral gastroenteritis including Norovirus caught?

Viral gastroenteritis is easily transmitted from one person to another.

- By contact with an infected person
- By contact with surfaces or objects that have been contaminated with viral particles
- By swallowing the virus dispersed in the air after someone has had projectile vomiting
- By consuming food or water contaminated with viral particles
- Also rarely from raw or undercooked food, particularly shell fish, as this may be contaminated with raw sewage

## Who is at risk of getting Norovirus or other viral gastroenteritis?

It affects people of all ages. The very young and elderly should take extra care if infected, as dehydration is more common in these age groups.

Outbreaks usually affect people who are in semi-closed environments, or where large numbers of people congregate for several days, providing an ideal environment for the spread of the disease.

## What are the symptoms?

The following symptoms will usually begin around 12 – 72 hours after becoming infected with gastroenteritis/Norovirus:

- Sudden onset of nausea followed by vomiting – which may be projectile
- Watery diarrhoea
- Stomach pains/cramps
- Some people may have a raised temperature, headache and aching limbs

Symptoms may last 12 – 72 hours. Most people will make a full recovery within 2 days. The very young, elderly or people with a weakened immune system may become dehydrated and require hospital treatment.

**If unwell at home and in doubt about the cause of symptoms, contact your GP.**

## Why does Norovirus often cause outbreaks?

It is easily spread from one person to another and the virus is able to survive in the environment for many days, more than 50% of people who are exposed to Norovirus will be affected.

There are many different strains and once infected immunity is short-lived.

## How can these outbreaks be controlled?

Outbreaks can be difficult to control in hospital.

The most effective way to control an outbreak is to isolate/nurse together patients who have become infected usually isolation lasts for 72 hours after symptoms have ceased.

Close the ward to new admissions who may be susceptible.

Enhance cleaning regimes using a bleach type agent to remove the viruses from surfaces/objects. Please NB. Bleach will discolour/damage certain fabrics – use with caution.

Institute good hygiene measures including hand washing using soap and water.

Provide advice on food handling.

Affected staff, relatives or visitors should not work/visit until they have been free from symptoms for 48 hours.