

Norovirus



Norovirus is a highly contagious illness caused by infection with a virus. It may be called by other names, such as stomach flu, viral gastroenteritis, and food poisoning. As few as 10 viral particles can cause infection; as a reference point the average stool or vomit volume can contain over 100 million particles.

There is no immunity for the illness. Anyone can get infected, and can have the illness multiple times.

It is a self-limiting illness, with onset usually 24 to 48 hours after exposure and duration of 1 to 2 days. Dehydration can be a problem with the elderly.

The source of norovirus is people – specifically, the feces and vomit of infected individuals.

Norovirus can become airborne, so being in or passing through a room in which an infected person has vomited can infect you simply by breathing.

People are contagious from the moment they start feeling ill to anywhere from 3 days to 2 weeks after they have “recovered”.

Norovirus is particularly persistent in the environment where it can remain almost indefinitely. In marine waters, dilution by volume will eventually render it ineffective, but this can take quite some time.

There is no vaccination to prevent norovirus, nor any drug to treat it. The best treatment is to drink plenty of fluids to stay hydrated.

Tips to prevent the spread of norovirus. Because it is extremely contagious, these practices must be observed to prevent its spread:

- Practice proper hand hygiene by using plenty of soap and water.
- In the home, carefully wash fruits and vegetables and cook shellfish thoroughly.
- Do not prepare food while infected.
- Clean and disinfect contaminated surfaces with a chlorine-based household cleaner.
- Wash laundry thoroughly, especially that which has been exposed to vomit or fecal matter. Avoid agitating the contaminated articles to prevent the virus from becoming airborne.

A special note for the commercial shellfish industry:

- Anyone currently infected must not be allowed near shellfish harvest beds.
- No overboard discharge of virus particles from vomit or stool is allowed.
- Norovirus is not particularly susceptible to either cold temperatures or ultraviolet radiation disinfection.
 - **Most recirculating wet storage UV installations operate at 15,000 to 16,000 $\mu\text{ws}/\text{cm}^2$** , which is good for a majority of bacterial pathogens and for many human viruses.
 - **Killing norovirus requires around 60,000 $\mu\text{ws}/\text{cm}^2$ UV intensity**, and studies at the University of California have recommended 90,000 to 100,000 $\mu\text{ws}/\text{cm}^2$ UV intensity to provide a margin of safety.

For people with disabilities, this document is available on request in other formats. To submit a request, call 1-800-525-0127 (TDD/TTY call 711)