

# Noroviruses

## What Are Noroviruses?

Norovirus infection (also known as Norwalk-like viruses) are illnesses that happen in the gastrointestinal (GI) tract. The most common symptoms include nausea, vomiting, stomach cramps or diarrhea. If a fever develops, it is usually low. Symptoms of a Norovirus infection may be more severe for older people, young children and those with other previous medical conditions who are more vulnerable to dehydration because of vomiting and diarrhea.

## How Do I Get Norovirus?

Noroviruses are easily spread. You may get Norovirus by coming into contact with other people who already have Norovirus or by contaminated food and water. If someone has Norovirus, the virus is in the infected person's stool and vomit. It is usually spread from person to person by having direct contact with hands contaminated by the stool of the sick person or by contact with stool-contaminated objects (e.g. door knobs, toilets etc.) and then touching your mouth. Usually you will not know you have Norovirus for one to two days after you have come into contact with the virus. Those with Norovirus can spread the virus to others for up to two days after diarrhea has stopped. Food can become contaminated if handled by an ill person who does not wash their hands after going to the bathroom or before preparing food. Avoid preparing or handling food for others, even for their family.

## What Is the Treatment for Noroviruses?

You usually get better in two to three days without any serious or long-term health effects. There is no specific treatment for Norovirus but you should get plenty of rest and replace lost body fluids by drinking liquids. If you become severely dehydrated, you should see your doctor immediately or come to the Emergency Department. Antibiotics are used for bacterial infections and will not be effective against this viral infection.

## What Special Precautions Are Required for Norovirus? What Do I Need to Know?

Together we can take steps to stop the spread of Norovirus to other patients in the hospital:

- A room by yourself;
- A long-sleeved gown, gloves and a face mask with eye protection must be worn by everyone who cares for you or visits you;
- A sign for "Droplet & Contact Precautions" will be placed on your door to remind everyone who enters your room about the special steps;

- Your room and the equipment used in your room will be cleaned and disinfected regularly;
- Everyone who leaves your room must clean their hands; and
- Activities outside your room may be restricted.

## What About My Family and Friends?

Signs outside your room show how to safely wear the masks, gown and gloves. Your family and visitors should not assist other patients as this may spread Norovirus. Before leaving your room, your family and visitors must remove the masks, gloves and gown. Then, they must clean their hands with alcohol hand rub.

## How Can I Prevent Getting Noroviruses?

Immunity to Norovirus is short and you can have a Norovirus infection again after a few weeks or months. The following steps may reduce the risk of developing or spreading Norovirus:

- Clean your hands frequently, especially after going to the bathroom and before eating or preparing food;
- Anyone who experience nausea, vomiting or diarrhea should not go to school or work and should not prepare or touch food for others;
- Avoid drinking untreated water; and
- Cook all shellfish thoroughly before eating.

## What Is Good Hand Cleaning?

Our staff welcomes reminders to clean our hands. We invite you to ask anyone who enters your room to clean their hands before and after they touch you. Ask any staff member to show you good hand cleaning (20 seconds of soap and running water OR waterless alcohol hand rub for 20 seconds until hands are dry). Please clean your hands often and ask for help to clean your hands if needed:

- After using the bathroom;
- After blowing your nose;
- Before eating and drinking;
- Before and after you touch your dressing or wounds;
- When your hands are visibly dirty; and
- Before you leave your room.

## What Happens When I Go Home?

We recommend:

- Designate one bathroom, if possible, to the person who has symptoms;
- Be sure to clean your bathroom thoroughly up to 48 hours after symptoms have stopped;
- Wash your hands well after using the toilet;
- Everyone who might help you with your personal hygiene or with going to the toilet should clean his or her hands after contact with you;
- Clean your hands before you make any food and before you eat. Everyone in the household should follow this practice; and
- Clothing may be laundered in the same manner as the rest of the household laundry.

Questions? Infection Prevention and Control department 519-464-4400 Ext. 5253.

References:

Adapted from the MoHLTC Public Health Division: Noroviruses Facts