



Hawaii State Department of Health

Disease Investigation Branch

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Norovirus

What is norovirus?

Noroviruses are a group of viruses that cause gastroenteritis (or nausea, vomiting and diarrhea). Viruses are very different from bacteria and parasites. Viruses are much smaller, are not affected by antibiotic treatment, and cannot grow outside of a host (for example, an animal or a human).

How do you get it?

Noroviruses are found in the stool or vomit of an infected person. People can become infected with norovirus by eating or drinking contaminated food or water, by touching contaminated objects or surfaces and then placing the hand or object in the mouth, or by direct contact with an infected person.

Norovirus can also be found in shellfish, especially oysters and clams.

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms of norovirus illness usually include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and stomach cramps. Some people may also have a mild fever, chills, headache, muscle aches, and increased tiredness. The illness often begins suddenly, and the infected person may feel very sick. The illness is usually short, with symptoms lasting only about 1 or 2 days.

When do symptoms start?

Symptoms of norovirus illness usually begin about 24 to 48 hours after exposure to the virus, but they can appear as early as 12 hours after exposure.

What is the treatment for norovirus infection?

There is no medicine that works against norovirus and there is no vaccine to prevent infection. Treatment is given to lessen the symptoms. Severe diarrhea and/or vomiting over a long time may cause the body to lose fluid too quickly. Lost fluids should be replaced by drinking liquids such as fruit juices, soups, and special fluids called oral rehydration fluids (ORF).

If you get norovirus once, can you get it again?

Yes. There are many different types of norovirus, and being infected with one will not protect you from being infected with another type.

Should an infected person stay away from school or work?

Yes. People with norovirus are contagious from the moment they begin feeling ill to at least 3 days to 2 weeks after the symptoms stop. It is important for people to use good hand washing practices, even after they feel better.

How can you keep from getting it?

Wash your hands well after using the toilet, changing diapers, and before preparing or eating food. After changing diapers, wash the child's hands as well as your own.

Immediately remove and wash soiled clothing or linens.

Carefully wash fruits and vegetables, and cook or steam oysters before eating them.

Clean and disinfect contaminated surfaces by using household bleach. Use the following concentrations, leave on for 10-20 minutes, and rinse with clean water:

1 tablespoon of bleach in 1 gallon of water for a 1:250 dilution:

- Use for stainless steel, food/mouth contact items, toys

1/3-cup of bleach in 1 gallon of water for a 1:50 dilution:

- Use for non-porous surfaces like tile floors, countertops, sinks, and toilets

1 and 2/3-cup of bleach in 1 gallon of water for a 1:10 dilution:

- Use for porous surfaces and wooden floors

For more information, see the CDC's website at

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/revb/gastro/norovirus-qa.htm>