

BEAT THE BUGS THIS WINTER

The illnesses to prepare for
and how to prevent them

TOPIC #3 Norovirus

Disease Snapshot

What to do if someone
has gastro symptoms

Q&As

AN ARPHS
PUBLIC HEALTH SERIES

Communications
June 2022 – For Review
30 September 2022



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Norovirus Disease Snapshot

What is it?

Noroviruses are a group of viruses that infect the stomach or gut and lead to vomiting and diarrhea (gastroenteritis).

The virus can survive for long periods outside the body, so hard surfaces like toys, plates, cutlery and other objects can become contaminated.

Who is at risk?

Anyone can be at risk of norovirus. It is spread in many ways, including:

- consuming food or drinks contaminated with norovirus
- having contact with a person who has norovirus
- touching contaminated surfaces or objects and then putting your fingers in your mouth
- through the air (when vomiting sends tiny particles into the air)

The faeces and vomit of people with norovirus are infectious.

Signs and symptoms

People with norovirus usually get sick within one to two days.

Symptoms can include feeling or being sick, diarrhoea, stomach cramps, headache, low-grade fever, chills and muscle aches. Symptoms can last from 12 to 72 hours, but some people may be unwell for longer.



How to prevent it

Careful handwashing and surface cleaning is important to stop the spread of the virus.

- Remind staff and attendees of your early learning service or school about the importance of hand hygiene.
- Make sure bathroom facilities are properly equipped with soap and paper towels, or clean, dry, hand towels.
- Make sure the right cleaning products are used in the right way. For example, alcohol-based hand sanitising gel does **not** completely inactivate norovirus.

What to do if you get symptoms

Anyone with norovirus symptoms should stay away from school, early learning services or work, and not prepare any food for others, until at least two days after the symptoms have stopped.



What happens if you have norovirus?

There is no specific treatment or vaccination for norovirus. It is not treated with antibiotics because it is caused by a virus, not bacteria.

Dehydration is the main cause of serious illness from norovirus, so it's important to drink extra fluid and rest to aid recovery. Children and older adults are especially at risk from dehydration.

If symptoms are severe, it's important to contact a doctor.



Where to find more information

Healthline: 0800 611 116

a free, 24/7 service with interpreters available

Auckland Regional Public Health Service

www.arphs.health.nz/norovirus

The Ministry of Health

www.health.govt.nz/your-health/conditions-and-treatments/diseases-and-illnesses/norovirus-vomiting-and-diarrhoea-bugs

KidsHealth (A Starship Foundation and Paediatric Society of New Zealand website)

www.kidshealth.org.nz/gastroenteritis-children

Health Navigator (Dehydration)

www.healthnavigator.org.nz/health-a-z/d/dehydration-adults

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What to do if someone has gastro symptoms

If a staff member or attendee at your early learning service or school has gastro symptoms (feeling or being sick, diarrhoea, stomach cramps, headache, low-grade fever, chills and muscle aches):

Immediately arrange for the person to go home or be collected and taken home.

Advise them not to return to your ELS or school until 48 hours after their symptoms end.

Remind them to call their doctor or Healthline (0800 611 116) for advice if they are concerned. Healthline is a free, 24/7 service with interpreters available.

Take care when cleaning any area that may have been contaminated by the sick person:

- Wear personal protective equipment such as gloves and an apron.
- Clean up vomit or faeces first with a detergent solution, then a solution of **household chlorine bleach**.
- Items like blankets and bedding should be washed using detergent and hot water.
- Open windows and doors to direct airflow to the exterior of the building.
- Clean hands thoroughly with soap and water for 20 seconds, then dry them on a clean, dry towel or disposable paper towel for a further 20 seconds.

Do not use alcohol-based hand sanitising gel or wipes as these do not completely inactivate norovirus.

If you have two or more cases of gastro at your school or ELS in quick succession, you may have an outbreak. Contact Auckland Regional Public Health Service (09 623 4600) and ask to speak to the Health Protection Officer.

More information

Healthline: 0800 611 116

KidsHealth

www.kidshealth.org.nz/gastroenteritis-children

Auckland Regional Public Health Service

www.arphs.health.nz/norovirus

Ministry of Health

www.health.govt.nz/your-health/conditions-and-treatments/diseases-and-illnesses/norovirus-vomiting-and-diarrhoea-bug

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Norovirus Q&As

When should you see a doctor if you have norovirus symptoms?

You should see a doctor if you or a family member:

- Has blood in their vomit
- Gets any new or worse symptoms
- Has vomiting or diarrhoea for longer than 3 days.

You should also see your doctor if you or a family member has become badly dehydrated. Signs of dehydration include:

- little or no urine passed in the last 8 hours and the urine is dark and smelly
- reduced saliva in their mouth, no tears, sunken eyes, sunken fontanelle in infants
- dizziness, lethargy (no energy), floppiness, a rapid heart rate and breathing, cool hands and feet or grey cold skin
- their skin doesn't relax after being pinched.

Is there treatment for norovirus?

No, there is no specific treatment or vaccination for norovirus. Dehydration is the main cause of serious illness.

- Drink plenty of fluids such as plain water and oral rehydration drinks.
- Don't take medicine to stop vomiting or diarrhoea (unless your doctor tells you to) as these will stop your body getting rid of the virus.

More information on treating dehydration is available on the Ministry of Health website:

www.health.govt.nz/your-health/conditions-and-treatments/diseases-and-illnesses/vomiting