

Fact Sheet - Norovirus (Previously known as Norwalk-like Viruses)

Norovirus can cause acute gastroenteritis (or severe tummy upset). It is highly contagious and can be spread from person to person very easily by the faecal-oral route (from faeces to mouth) through contaminated hands, food, water and items in the environment.

What are the symptoms?

You may experience nausea, sudden onset vomiting, stomach cramps and watery diarrhoea. It usually occurs between 24 and 48 hours after exposure to the virus and the symptoms may last from 24 to 60 hours. Some people may be unwell for a longer period.

Not everyone will get all the symptoms and some people who have been infected get no symptoms at all. Dehydration (loss of fluid) is the most common complication, particularly among the young and elderly.

How is it treated?

There is no special antiviral treatment. Your body will clear the virus on its own. Symptoms last from 1 day to 2 weeks. Extra fluid and rest are the recommendations.

If your symptoms are severe you should consult your doctor.

How is it spread?

You can become infected when you ingest the virus.

- ◆ Food can become contaminated if infected food handlers don't wash their hands properly after going to the toilet.
- ◆ Water polluted by sewage can contaminate shellfish and the water supply if it is not treated properly.
- ◆ It can spread from person to person through inhaling airborne particles of the virus that are released during vomiting
- ◆ The virus can survive for a long time on surfaces that have been touched by contaminated hands such as handrails, door knobs, tap fittings and toilet facilities.

How can it be prevented?

- ◆ Clean your hands thoroughly. Wash with soap and water for 10-15 seconds and dry thoroughly with disposable paper towels or a clean dry cloth. (Drying is important!).
- ◆ Clean your hands after contact with any soiled articles, after going to the toilet and before preparing, or handling food.
- ◆ Avoid preparing food at home and work until you have been symptom free for 48 hours.

REMEMBER!

- Strict hand hygiene is important. Clean your hands after going to the toilet, before handling any food and after touching anything that might be contaminated with Norovirus.
- Cook food thoroughly.
- Avoid contact with infants, the elderly and anyone with a long term illness while you have symptoms. Avoid visiting friends or family who are in hospital while you have diarrhoea.
- Don't handle or prepare food for others until you are free of all symptoms for at least 48 hours.

Where can I get more information?

This fact sheet provides basic general information only and is to be used as a quick guide, not as a complete resource on the subject. The Auckland Regional Public Health service also has further information on Norovirus.

If you have any further questions, ask your own physician, local health unit or health care worker.