

# Norovirus

## Community and Public Health

Phone: 03 364 1777

Web: [www.cph.co.nz](http://www.cph.co.nz)

Norovirus causes a vomiting and diarrhoea (gastrointestinal) illness that is highly infectious. It is a major cause of:

- non-bacterial food and waterborne outbreaks world-wide; and
- gastrointestinal outbreaks in institutions such as childcare centres and rest homes.

People of any age can become infected with the virus. You can get Norovirus even if you have never had it before.

### What are the symptoms?

Onset of symptoms occurs 10 to 50 hours (usually 24 hours) after exposure to an infected person, food or environment.

The illness may include all or any combination of the following symptoms:

- Vomiting (often projectile);
- Stomach cramps;
- Diarrhoea;
- Fever;
- Headache;
- Muscle or joint pain;
- Nausea; and
- Lethargy (lack of energy).



Symptoms may last for 24 to 60 hours. A person can be infectious for 1 to 2 weeks from the start of illness.

### How is it caught or spread?

The virus is spread by swallowing or breathing in droplets containing the virus from the faeces (poo) or vomit of an infected person. This can occur by:

- Eating contaminated food and water;
- Inhaling or swallowing tiny vomit droplets hanging in the air after someone else has vomited; or
- Touching contaminated surfaces.

Norovirus can survive for weeks on surfaces such as walls, furnishings, light shades, carpet, walls etc.

### How is it treated?

There is no specific treatment for this disease. The symptoms can be relieved by:

- Drinking plenty of fluids to avoid dehydration; and
- Taking paracetamol for the fever and pain.

The use of anti-diarrhoea medications is not usually necessary as the illness is short lived.

## How is spread prevented?

### *From person to person*

- Wash and dry hands thoroughly using soap and water after going to the toilet, changing nappies, or caring for an infected person.
- Use separate hand towels for sick people.
- Infected people should not prepare food.

Alcohol hand sanitiser can be used in addition to—not instead of—hand washing.

### *From the environment*

Airborne droplets of vomit can spread over a large area and settle on any surface. So cleaning and disinfecting needs to encompass a much wider area of at least a few metres than just the obviously affected area.

- Surfaces should be washed with soap and water to remove soiling before sanitising or disinfecting.
- Chlorine-based household bleaches are most effective against this virus.
- Always follow the manufacturers' instructions for correct bleach dilution rates for sanitising or disinfecting.
- Do not use bleach on surfaces that may leach colour such as carpet and furnishings.
- Wash contaminated laundry thoroughly.

## Staying away from work, school or preschool

Outbreaks frequently occur in institutional settings such as rest homes, preschools and workplaces. So it is important that anyone infected is excluded to prevent further spread of the virus.

Anyone who is sick needs to stay home until they have been free of symptoms for 48 hours.

Check with your workplace as they may have their own guidelines for exclusion from work when ill.

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## Other resources available on gastrointestinal illnesses:

- Campylobacter, E. coli and Salmonella
- Cryptosporidium and Giardia
- Rotavirus
- Viral Gastroenteritis

*Image sourced from the Live Strong website.*

## Community and Public Health: Community Health Information Centres

### **Christchurch**

Phone: 03 378 6721

Fax: 03 379 6125

[chic@cdhb.health.nz](mailto:chic@cdhb.health.nz)

### **Ashburton**

Phone: 03 307 6902

Fax: 03 307 8081

[ashburton.chic@cdhb.health.nz](mailto:ashburton.chic@cdhb.health.nz)

### **Timaru**

Phone: 03 687 2600

Fax: 03 688 6091

[timaru.chic@cdhb.health.nz](mailto:timaru.chic@cdhb.health.nz)

### **Greymouth**

Phone: 03 768 1160

Fax: 03 768 1169

[westcoast.chic@cdhb.health.nz](mailto:westcoast.chic@cdhb.health.nz)