

Norovirus

What is it?

Noroviruses are a group of viruses that cause the most common stomach bugs (gastroenteritis). They are also known the “winter vomiting bug” or “Norwalk-like viruses. Noroviruses are spread very easily from person to person by contact with contaminated surfaces (toilet seats, cutlery, drinking beakers) or by consuming contaminated water or food. Only 10-100 particles are needed to pass on the virus which is why they are so easily spread.

Norovirus often causes outbreaks because it is easily spread from one person to another and the virus is able to survive in the environment for many days. There are many different strains of norovirus, immunity is short-lived and infection with one strain does not protect against infection with another strain. Outbreaks commonly occur in semi-closed environments such as care homes due to the close contact between residents and staff.

Symptoms

Symptoms start 12- 48 hours after contamination. The most common symptoms are feeling of sickness, followed by projectile vomiting and watery diarrhoea. Sometimes there is a raised fever, headaches and aching limbs. The most worrying consequence from infection by the virus is dehydration. Symptoms last for approximately 2-4 days.

Symptoms of dehydration include:

- dizziness or lightheadedness
- headache
- tiredness/lethargy
- dry mouth, lips and eyes
- dark, concentrated urine
- only passing small amounts of urine (less than 3-4 times a day)

Treatment

Ensure that the resident has adequate fluids to replace what is lost and paracetamol for headache and fever. Antibiotics are not effective as the illnesses are caused by viruses not bacteria.

Ensure that hygiene remains a high priority by washing tables and surfaces, as well as bathrooms and high risk areas regularly. Good hand hygiene from staff and residents must be encouraged. Try to contain the spread by stopping admissions to care homes during an outbreak and discouraging visitors in to the care home. If symptoms continue for more than 3 days, or symptoms of acute dehydration are present in a resident contact their GP for further assessment and advice.

Outbreaks should be reported to the Public Health England Health Protection Team, further guidance is available on the PHE website:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/public-health-england>