



# Norovirus (winter vomiting virus)

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**This leaflet is for patients, relatives and visitors and explains what Norovirus is, how it is spread and how it can be managed.**

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## What is Norovirus?

Norovirus is the most common cause of infectious diarrhoea and vomiting in the UK. Norovirus was historically known as 'winter vomiting disease'. There are up to one million cases a year and it is usually more noticeable in the winter.

## What are the symptoms?

Sudden vomiting (often with no warning) is the main symptom. This may be accompanied by diarrhoea. Sometimes, diarrhoea develops a day or so later. Infected patients can develop diarrhoea without the vomiting.

Symptoms begin around 12-24 hours after becoming infected. It is a self-limiting illness – an illness that runs its own course and clears up on its own – and symptoms usually last between 12-60 hours (sometimes longer in older people).

## Who is at risk?

Everyone is at risk, especially where there are large numbers of people together, e.g. family gatherings, hospitals, schools, nursing homes, hotels and cruise ships.

## What is the treatment?

There is no specific treatment for Norovirus. However, doctors and nurses will ensure that patients are adequately hydrated (have plenty of fluids). If symptoms are particularly severe or last for more than 3 to 4 days please call your GP to prevent complications caused by becoming dehydrated.

## How is it spread?

Virus particles are present in extremely high numbers in infected vomit and faeces. This makes Norovirus highly infectious. It can be spread via people's hands, through the air and from equipment and objects (toilets, commodes, lavatory flush handles, taps and door handles).

An outbreak can be difficult to control because the infection is so easy to transmit.

## How is the spread of infection prevented?

- Please do not visit patients in the hospital if you have any of the symptoms of Norovirus, and stay away for a further 48 hours after your last episode of symptoms, as you may still be infectious.

- It is really important to wash your hands with soap and water after contact with someone who has Norovirus symptoms, or their immediate surroundings, as well as after using the toilet and before eating meals.
- In the hospital we carry out regular cleaning of the wards, cleaning often-touched surfaces such as toilet door handles and correctly dealing with spillages of bodily fluids.
- In your home environment, we would advise thorough cleaning of hard surfaces with a bleach solution, paying particular attention to the toilet, toilet area and door handles. It is important to clean up any areas where someone has vomited as quickly as possible.

### **Is it necessary to isolate a patient with Norovirus?**

It may be necessary to isolate affected patients. If the whole ward is affected, we may need to close the ward to admissions. It may also be necessary to restrict visiting this may mean that only very close relatives may visit.

### **Questions and concerns**

If you have any questions or concerns about Norovirus, please ask your nurse for further information or you can contact the Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust Infection Control team on 0118 322 6914, email: [infection.control@royalberkshire.nhs.uk](mailto:infection.control@royalberkshire.nhs.uk).

### **How do I find out more?**

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/norovirus/>

Thames Valley Health Protection Team Tel: 0344 225 3861 <https://www.gov.uk/health-protection-team>

United Kingdom Health Security Agency Website:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/uk-health-security-agency>

To find out more about our Trust visit [www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk](http://www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk)

**Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.**

Simon Wells, RBFT Infection Prevention & Control, November 2024

Next review due: November 2026