

Norovirus (winter vomiting bug)



Information for patients, relatives, carers
and visitors

This leaflet answers some of the questions you may have about norovirus. It explains how it is spread and how you can prevent it.

Confirming your identity

Before you have a treatment or procedure, our staff will ask you your **name** and **date of birth** and check your **ID band**. If you don't have an ID band we will also ask you to confirm your address.

If we don't ask these questions, then please ask us to check.

Ensuring your safety is our primary concern.

What is norovirus?

Norovirus is a highly contagious virus commonly known as the 'winter vomiting bug', although you can catch it at any time of the year.

Norovirus is the most common stomach bug in the UK. It spreads easily and quickly, causing vomiting and diarrhoea (gastroenteritis). You can catch it whatever your age but if you are very young, elderly or have a weak immune system, you should take extra care because you can become dehydrated.

Because it spreads so easily and can survive for several days on surfaces and objects touched by infected people, it commonly causes outbreaks of gastroenteritis in busy places such as nursing homes, hospitals and schools.

That means it is more likely to affect healthcare workers, patients and hospital visitors. It can cause major disruption in hospitals because of the actions that have to be taken to reduce the spread of the virus and because staff can become ill as well.

How is it spread?

- Contact with someone who is infected, especially their hands. This is the most common way it is spread.
- Eating or drinking contaminated food or water.
- Touching contaminated surfaces or objects.

It is really important to wash your hands with soap and water after using the toilet, before preparing food and if you have come into contact with someone who is infected.



How can I avoid spreading the virus?

- Stay at home if you have any of the symptoms such as diarrhoea and/or vomiting.
- Do not visit anyone in hospital until 48 hours after your symptoms have gone.
- Wash your hands well and often **with soap and water**, especially after you use the toilet. **Alcohol hand gel does not prevent the spread of Norovirus.**
- At home try not to share towels with anyone who has norovirus.
- Keep your home as clean as possible – particularly your bathroom and toilet – with a bleach-based household cleaning product.
- Wash any contaminated clothing or bedding separately on as high a temperature as possible, to kill the virus.
- Wash fruit before eating.

What are the symptoms?

The most common symptoms of norovirus are a sudden onset of nausea followed by projectile vomiting and watery diarrhoea. Other symptoms include stomach cramps, muscle aches, headache and fever. You may get some or all of these about 12 – 48 hours after becoming infected. These are usually short lived and may last up to three days with a quick recovery.

What should I do if I get norovirus?

Although it is unpleasant, it is rarely dangerous. There is no specific treatment or cure and it is best to let the illness run its course. But if you are very young, elderly or have a weak immune system, you are more at risk of dehydration, so it is particularly important that you drink lots of fluids.

If you think you are dehydrated, your symptoms continue or you become increasingly unwell, please contact NHS 111 or telephone your GP (home

doctor) for advice.

To ease your symptoms you can:

- take painkillers such as paracetamol to help ease any headaches, fever, and aching.
- drink plenty of fluids so you do not become dehydrated.

Take rehydration drinks (available from your local pharmacy) if you are worried that you are becoming dehydrated. These provide the correct balance of water, salt and sugar for your body.

How long does the illness last?

You usually get the symptoms about 12 – 48 hours after becoming infected. Most people recover without any problems within one – three days.

Can I visit family and friends in hospital?

There may be restrictions on visiting to help manage the situation. If a ward or bay is closed, please discuss any restrictions with the nurse in charge.

This situation will be reviewed when there are fewer patients infected.

More information

NHS Choices has more details about symptoms, treatment and prevention.

www.nhs.uk

NHS 111

For health advice and reassurance about what to do next, call NHS 111. The service is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.



PALS

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) is a service that offers support, information and assistance to patients, relatives and visitors. They can also provide help and advice if you have a concern or complaint that staff have not been able to resolve for you.

PALS at King's College Hospital, Denmark Hill, London SE5 9RS:

Tel: **020 3299 3601**

Email: **kch-tr.pals@nhs.net**

You can also contact us by using our online form at

www.kch.nhs.uk/contact/pals

PALS at Princess Royal University Hospital, Farnborough Common, Orpington, Kent BR6 8ND

Tel: **01689 863252**

Email: **kch-tr.palskent@nhs.net**

If you would like the information in this leaflet in a different language or format, please contact PALS on 020 3299 1844.



