

# Gastroenteritis due to Norovirus

## Patient and visitor information

This information is for patients, relatives and carers. It explains what Norovirus is, how it affects us, how it spreads and what we can do to stop it spreading.

### **What is Norovirus?**

Norovirus, also referred to as Small Round Structured Virus (SRSV) or Norwalk-like virus, commonly causes gastroenteritis. The infection is common in the months of November to April and is sometimes called 'winter vomiting disease'.

### **Why is it a problem?**

This form of gastroenteritis is very common in the general population. It is easily passed from one person to another through contact with an infected person or contaminated surfaces or by consuming contaminated food or water.

This type of virus is most frequently introduced into a hospital from outside and as it is very contagious, it can spread very easily within the hospital. Large numbers of patients and staff could become affected so it is important to stop the illness from spreading around the hospital or to relatives and friends.

### **How does this affect me?**

If you become unwell with diarrhoea or vomiting on the ward you will be moved to a side room or to an area with other patients who have the same illness.

You should have as few visitors as possible and they will need to wash their hands before and after seeing you.

### **How long until symptoms develop?**

It can take from 12 to 72 hours for symptoms to start. However, the very young and the elderly may develop symptoms more quickly.

### **What are the symptoms?**

Norovirus causes symptoms of 'gastric flu'. It most often results in vomiting and/or diarrhoea. It usually lasts for two to three days. Some people may have a raised temperature, headaches, aching limbs and abdominal cramps.

### **Will I need treatment?**

Antibiotics are not needed to treat Norovirus. The main treatment is making sure you drink plenty of fluid. If you develop diarrhoea and vomiting, a stool sample may be sent to the

laboratory for testing. Once the illness is over no further action is necessary and your treatment will continue as before.

**Will any treatment be delayed?**

Generally, investigations and treatments will continue with staff taking the correct precautions. However, sometimes we may have to delay non-urgent investigations if you are experiencing severe diarrhoea.

**If I have Norovirus how will you look after me?**

If you are in hospital you will be asked to move to a single room or designated ward. You will also be allocated a toilet or commode specifically for your use. This will help prevent spread of the infection to other patients.

You must make sure you wash your hands well with soap and water after using the toilet and before meals. Wet wipes are also available, so please ask.

**Please note:** alcohol hand rubs are not effective against some germs such as Norovirus so please ask the staff what to do.

Staff will wear aprons and gloves to look after you, and wash their hands before and after giving you care. This will help prevent the spread of infection to other patients.

**May I have visitors?**

Yes, you may have visitors. However, it is advisable to keep the number of visitors to a minimum as they may pick up the virus when on the ward. Although the symptoms are mild, certain people are more vulnerable and should be discouraged from coming to visit you, such as children and the elderly, diabetics or those with problems with their immune system.

**Friends and relatives who are unwell or suffering from diarrhoea and vomiting themselves should not visit.**

If you have any concerns at all about someone visiting please discuss this with a doctor or nurse. To prevent the spread of infection, whenever possible your visitors should keep away from other wards and places where food is served.

**Do visitors need to take precautions when visiting me?**

Visitors should wash their hands thoroughly before and after visiting you.

The nursing staff will advise if any further precautions are necessary. Your visitors will not require gloves and aprons unless they are helping with your personal care or they are visiting another patient afterwards.

Your visitors should never touch a wound or device such as a drip or catheter.

Visitors should not sit on your bed and may only use public toilets.

### **Can my washing be sent home?**

Yes, laundry can still be taken home and washed as usual. Wash soiled laundry on a separate cycle and at 60°C if the fabric will withstand the temperature.

### **Can I go home with *Norovirus*?**

You would normally wait until the diarrhoea/vomiting has settled and your medical team are satisfied that you are fit for discharge.

When you go home you should:

- continue to wash your hands with soap and water
- carry out your personal hygiene regularly but do not share towels and face cloths
- advise your family to wash their hands with soap and water if they have helped care for you
- clean surfaces in the bathrooms and toilets after use

### **Further questions:**

Should you have any further concerns or questions then please do not hesitate to speak to the ward staff or ask them to contact a member of the hospital's infection prevention and control team:

### **Infection Prevention & Control Team - Tel: 01342 414341**

The hospital has an infection prevention and control team; they are:

Sheila Loveridge – Lead Infection Control Nurse Specialist  
Sarah Prevett - Infection Control Nurse Specialist  
A Consultant Microbiologist  
Jo Thomas - Director of Infection Prevention and Control

**Please ask if you would like this leaflet in larger print or an alternative format.**

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