

NOROVIRUS FACT SHEET

Definition:

- Norwalk Virus infection is a gastrointestinal illness caused by the Norwalk virus.
- Other viruses with similar features were described and called Norwalk-like viruses and cause Norwalk-like illness.
- These have been classified as members of the *calicivirus* family. Norovirus was recently approved as the official name for this group of viruses.
- Humans are the only known host.
- Often occur in outbreaks.

What are the Symptoms?

- Abrupt onset of nausea and/or vomiting, watery diarrhea, abdominal cramps, sometimes additionally low-grade fever, chills, headache, muscle aches, fatigue.
- Children experience more vomiting than adults.
- The illness is usually brief with symptoms lasting only 1-3 days.

How is Norovirus Spread?

The main source of the virus is stool and vomit from infected persons. The virus is transmitted via the fecal-oral route, through direct person to person contact on unwashed hands, through the consumption of fecally contaminated food, water or ice, through environmental and fomite contamination, or through aerosolization of vomitus entering the oral mucosa and being swallowed.

Viral shedding of Noroviruses may occur pre-symptomatic, but is usually with onset of symptoms, until 72 hours after symptoms have resolved although some suggest up to two weeks after recovery.

The incubation Period is 24 to 48 hours after ingestion of the virus, and as early as 12 hours after exposure.

How is Norovirus Diagnosed?

Norovirus is detected in stool samples, taken within 48-72 hours of onset of symptoms for best results, and through electron microscopy PCR in outbreaks. Samples of vomitus can also be sent. Label clearly, indicate specimen type and choose Norovirus NAT when ordering. There should be no bacterial pathogen. Usually after 5 confirmed cases no more testing is done in outbreaks.

Infection Control

- Frequent hand hygiene is the single most important measure to reduce risk of transmitting the virus from person to person.
- Gowns and gloves are worn to provide barrier protection.
- Masks for aerosols are worn during procedures and patient care activities that are likely to generate splashes or sprays (patient vomiting, discarding vomit or stool).
- Place patient in a private room.
- Cohort ill patients.
- Cohort staff assignments.
- Thoroughly clean and disinfect contaminated surfaces immediately after an episode of illness.
- Proper and safe disposal of stool and vomitus (shield for hoppers).
- No sharing of food between staff and/or between patients.
- Ill staff should contact Employee Health at 604-833-2051 M-F 0800 – 1700 for guidance on return to work.

