



Norovirus

Factsheet for Patients/Family



What are Noroviruses

“Norwalk-like viruses” are a group of viruses that cause gastrointestinal illnesses or gastroenteritis. This illness is often called the “stomach flu.” The “stomach flu” is not related to Influenza, which is a respiratory illness caused by the Influenza virus. The Norwalk virus was first identified during a gastroenteritis outbreak in Norwalk Ohio, in 1972.

What are the symptoms of norovirus?

Symptoms of norovirus usually begin 24-48 hours after exposure to the virus, but can appear as early as 12 hours after. The most common symptoms are nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and stomach cramping. Fever is usually low grade or absent. The illness often begins suddenly, and normally lasts only 1 or 2 days. Treatment is not generally needed unless the person develops severe dehydration or complications.

How does the virus spread?

Norovirus is spread by exposure to infected individuals. The virus is present in stool and vomit of infected people. It can also live on surfaces like toilets, bed rails, and handles. When you touch these items your hands become contaminated. When you touch your mouth without washing your hands you may become sick. Noroviruses are highly contagious and can cause institutional outbreaks. This is why we must use additional precautions.

What are additional precautions?

It is very important to contain these viruses so they do not spread to others. We do this by:

1. Isolating gastro patients and putting a “Contact Precautions” sign on the door.
2. Wearing a yellow long sleeved gown and gloves when entering the room to care for the patient.
3. Washing our hands before entering the room and after leaving the room.

How long will I be isolated?

You will be isolated until 48 hours after your last episode of diarrhea and/or vomiting.

What can I do to help?

1. Remind **all** staff caring for you to wash their hands when they enter your room and when they leave.
2. If you are going for tests in another department tell staff transporting you that you have norovirus.
3. Wash your hands after you use the toilet, before you eat, after blowing your nose, after touching your dressing.
4. Talk to your nurse or doctor if you have any questions.

What about family and visitors?

Family and visitors must first talk with a nurse before coming into the room. Young visitors should be closely supervised.

- All visitors must wash hands before entering the room. After leaving the room visitors must wash hands with available waterless hand rub.
- Any visitors providing direct care for the patient (bathing, washing, toileting, dressing changes, care for open areas, and feeding) must wear a yellow long sleeved gown and gloves.
- Visitors must not use the patient’s bathroom.
- If the floor you are visiting is in an “outbreak” situation, you must not visit other areas of the hospital including the cafeteria, gift shop, coffee kiosk, or other patient areas during the same trip.

What should I do at home?

- Wash your hands often especially after going to the bathroom and before preparing food..
- Do not prepare food for others while you have Norwalk symptoms.
- Thoroughly clean surfaces contaminated with body fluids. Use an all purpose household cleaner and follow the label.