

# Viral Gastroenteritis



## What is Viral Gastroenteritis?

Viral gastroenteritis is an infection caused by viruses. Two common causes of gastroenteritis are *Norovirus* and *Rotavirus*. These viruses have been linked to outbreaks of gastrointestinal illness in residential communities, schools, institutions, and child care centers. Attendees of these types of facilities are especially vulnerable to outbreaks of such illness. Often, the exact source is hard to identify and, once the virus is introduced, it spreads rapidly.

## How are Norovirus and Rotavirus spread?

These viruses are spread primarily by touching the mouth with contaminated hands. In most facilities, they are spread when ill people contaminate their hands with stool or vomit-containing particles of the virus. Virus can also be spread by touching contaminated objects or surfaces, having skin-to-skin or hand-to-hand contact with an infected person or by breathing in airborne viruses after an ill person vomits. Norovirus and Rotavirus are very contagious because they are present in very high amounts in the stool and vomit of ill persons. It only takes a few particles of the virus to cause illness in a susceptible person.

## What are the signs and symptoms of Norovirus and Rotavirus infection?

- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Stomach cramps

Affected people usually recover within 3-8 days for Rotavirus and 2-3 days for Norovirus.  
Severe illness requiring hospitalization is rare.

## How are Norovirus and Rotavirus controlled?

- ➔ ALL students, staff, volunteers, parents, and visitors should wash their hands frequently and ALWAYS:
  - After using the toilet or assisting someone with toileting, including diaper changes
  - Before and after preparing food
  - Before and after caring for someone who is ill
  - After touching contaminated objects, such as telephones, doorknobs, counter and table tops, arms or chairs, mats, toilets or training bowls, diaper changing tables and toys.
- ➔ Additionally, all persons should wear gloves when expecting contact with ANY body fluid such as vomit and stool. Assume the body fluids are contaminated.
- ➔ Wear a mask when cleaning, or in contact with, visibly soiled surfaces, objects, and ill people.
- ➔ Place soiled linens in a plastic bag before sending them to their homes.
- ➔ Wash soiled linen in hot water and dry at the hottest setting possible.
- ➔ Use a freshly prepared bleach solution to disinfect contaminated surfaces:

**Use a 1:10 dilution after cleaning surfaces soiled by blood, feces & vomitus:**  
2 Tbsp. Bleach in 1 cup water, OR  
1 2/3 cup bleach in 1 gallon water

**Use a 1:100 dilution for disinfecting commonly touched surfaces**  
½ tsp. Bleach in 1 cup water, OR  
1 ½ Tbsp bleach in 1 gallon water

## If an outbreak of Norovirus or Rotavirus is suspected, follow these steps:

- ➔ Contact San Mateo County Health Department (650) 573-2346 M-F, 8 am to 5 pm, or (650) 363-4981 evenings, weekends and holidays.
- ➔ Contact your facility's licensing agency.
- ➔ Send ill students and staff members home.
- ➔ Request that ill students stay home until they have been symptom-free for at least 48 hours. *Encourage drinking of clear liquids to prevent dehydration.*
- ➔ Request that ill staff members, volunteers and family members stay at home until they have been symptom-free for at least 48 hours.
- ➔ Limit visits and unnecessary field trips in and out of facility to the extent possible while the outbreak is ongoing.
- ➔ Minimize group and social activities, to the extent possible, while the outbreak is ongoing.
- ➔ The best way to protect children against rotavirus is to get them vaccinated on time ( 2 or 3 doses depending on what vaccine brand is used).
- ➔ There is no vaccine for Norovirus.

**Following these recommendations as soon as possible can reduce the amount of time your facility experiences an outbreak of Norovirus or Rotavirus.**

For more information, please go to <http://www.smchealth.org/cdcontrol> or contact the San Mateo County Communicable Disease Control Program at (650) 573-2346.