

# Viral Gastroenteritis Caused by Norovirus



## What is Viral Gastroenteritis?

Viral gastroenteritis is an infection caused by viruses. One of these viruses is called *Norovirus*. Noroviruses have been linked to outbreaks of gastrointestinal illness in residential communities, schools, institutions, and child care centers. Residents and 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 is Norovirus spread?

Norovirus is spread primarily by touching the mouth with contaminated hands. In most facilities, Norovirus is spread when ill people contaminate their hands with stool or vomit- containing particles of the virus. Norovirus 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. Noroviruses 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 infection?

- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Stomach cramps

Affected people usually recover within 2-3 days and severe illness requiring hospitalization is rare.

## How is Norovirus controlled?

- ➔ ALL residents, attendees, staff, volunteers, 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, side rails, counter and table tops, arms or chairs, walkers, canes.
- ➔ 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 the laundry.
- ➔ 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 is suspected, follow these steps:

- ➔ Contact San Mateo County Communicable Disease Control (650) 573-2346, M-F, 8 am to 5 pm, or (650) 363-4981 evenings, weekends and holidays.
- ➔ Contact your facility's licensing agency.
- ➔ Request that ill residents stay in their rooms/apartments, and visitors stay at home until they have been symptom - free for at least 48 hours. *Encourage drinking of clear liquids to prevent dehydration.*
- ➔ Limit admissions, visits and unnecessary transports in and out of facility to the extent possible while the outbreak is ongoing.
- ➔ Close group dining rooms while the outbreak is ongoing.
- ➔ Restrict group and social activities, to the extent possible, while the outbreak is ongoing.
- ➔ Send ill staff members, volunteers, and family members home.
- ➔ Request that ill staff members, volunteers and family members stay at home until they have been symptom- free for at least 48 hours.

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

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