



NOROVIRUS, previously *NORWALK VIRUS* or *NORWALK-LIKE* or *CALICIVIRUS INFECTIONS*

What is Norovirus infection?

Norovirus causes a gastrointestinal illness. It often occurs in outbreak form and, unfortunately, is sometimes referred to as *stomach flu*, though the terms *flu* or *influenza* should really be restricted to a respiratory infection.

What are Norovirus infections?

The original Norovirus, previously named *Norwalk Virus*, was first identified in 1972 after an outbreak (in 1968) of gastrointestinal illness at a primary school in Norwalk, Ohio. Later, other viruses with similar features to Norwalk viruses, and therefore called *Norwalk-like* viruses or *SRSVs* (*small round structured viruses*), were identified and found to cause similar disease. Hence they were classified together as members of the *calicivirus* family.

Where is Norovirus found?

Norwalk and Norwalk-like viruses are found worldwide. The viruses are passed in the stool and vomit of infected persons.

How do people get Norovirus infection?

People get a Norovirus infection directly from an ill individual **who did not wash his/her hands adequately**, or indirectly from food or water contaminated by the stool or vomit from an infected person, or from airborne particles produced by vomiting/defaecating. Outbreaks everywhere are commonly linked to food handled by infected food handlers, by person-to-person contact - especially in day care centers and nursing homes/custodial institutions - and from eating raw shellfish, especially oysters and clams that are grown in foul waters.

Who is at risk for Norovirus infection?

Anyone can get Norovirus infection, and can get it many times since immunity isn't long lasting.

What are the signs and symptoms of Norovirus infection?

- Nausea
- Sudden onset violent vomiting
- Diarrhoea
- Abdominal cramps
- Low grade fever or none at all

A good clue that an outbreak is due to SRSV is the prevalence of both vomiting and diarrhoea in cases, with many cases experiencing both symptoms. While infected persons usually recover fully in one to three days' illness may be severe in elderly or very young persons who may require hospitalisation.

How soon after exposure do symptoms appear?

Symptoms can appear between 12 and 48 hours after exposure. But a person can still be infectious up to two weeks after being ill. Maybe longer in some cases. No one can be 100% certain.

How is Norovirus infection diagnosed?

Laboratory diagnosis is difficult and clinical diagnosis is often made from the combination of symptoms (vomiting and diarrhoea) and relatively brief illness. Sophisticated laboratory methods to confirm clinical suspicion are generally available only at large laboratories.

What is the treatment for Norovirus infection?

No specific treatment is available. Persons who are severely dehydrated might need fluid and electrolyte therapy. [Electrolade](#)[®] is often prescribed.

How common is Norovirus infection?

Noroviruses, previously called Norwalk and Norwalk-like viruses are thought to be the leading causes of vomiting/diarrhoea in Scotland. However, since no routine and easy test is available, the real extent of the disease is not known – in particular since many people don't report it.

How can Norovirus be prevented?

Wash hands with soap and warm water after toilet visits and before preparing or eating food. People with symptoms of Norwalk-like illness should not prepare food or provide patient care. Cook all shellfish thoroughly before eating. Wash raw vegetables before eating. Custodial institutions need to assure a high level of personal hygiene to avoid person-to-person spread. Caretakers need to increase precautions to avoid transmission, particularly by **washing hands frequently** and especially before and after patient care.

Is there a vaccine for NOROVIRUS?

Not at the moment. However, an American pharmaceutical company called [LIGOCYTE](#) is currently conducting trials - so the outlook is encouraging.

Meanwhile, the best way to avoid NOROVIRUS is via **strict hygiene and frequent hand washing, as described above.**