



## Norovirus

Norovirus is one of the most common causes of vomiting and diarrhoea (gastrointestinal) illness with 50,000 cases in New Zealand every year.

It's a major cause of non-bacterial food and waterborne outbreaks worldwide and tummy bug outbreaks in hospitals, early childhood centres and rest homes.

### What are the symptoms?

Norovirus tends to come on quickly but doesn't stay around for long and may include:

- Vomiting
- Stomach cramps
- Diarrhoea
- Fever
- Headache
- Muscle/joints aches and pains
- Nausea
- Lack of energy.

Symptoms usually occur 24 hours after exposure to an infected person, food or environment. A person is most infectious when they have diarrhoea and/or vomiting.

### How can I get it?

Norovirus is spread by swallowing and/or breathing in droplets containing the virus from the faeces or vomit of an infected person.

This can occur by:

- Eating contaminated food and water
- Person-to-person via tiny vomit droplets hanging in the air from a person that has vomited
- By touching contaminated surfaces.

### How can I prevent spread?

From people:

- Wash and dry your hands thoroughly with soap and water after going to the toilet or changing nappies
- Use separate hand towels for sick people
- Do not prepare food if you are infected.



From the environment:

Airborne droplets of vomit can spread over a large area and settle on any surface so it's important to clean at least a few metres around the obviously affected area.

- Surfaces should be washed with soap and water to remove soiling before disinfecting
- Chlorine-based household bleaches are the most effective against the virus
- Always follow the manufacturers instructions for correct dilution rates for disinfecting
- Don't use bleach on surfaces that may leak colour, eg: carpet and furnishings.

### How is it treated?

No specific treatment is available but symptoms can be relieved by drinking plenty of fluids and taking paracetamol for the fever and pain.

Using anti-diarrhoeal medications is not usually necessary because the illness doesn't last long.

### Taking time off work or school

Outbreaks frequently occur in rest homes, early childhood centres and workplaces. Making sure sick people stay away helps prevent the virus spreading.

Sick people need to stay away until they have been free of symptoms for 48 hours.

For more information contact a Health Protection Officer at Toi Te Ora Public Health Service, free phone 0800 221 555.