Norovirus

Patient information sheet

What is norovirus?

Norovirus, or as it is more commonly known, the winter vomiting bug, is caused by a group of viruses that are the most common reason for gastroenteritis (diarrhoea and vomiting) in the UK.

How is it spread?

The virus can be spread by contact with infected people, by consuming contaminated food or drink, or by having contact with contaminated surfaces or objects. It can also be spread by airborne droplets during a vomiting episode. These can then be inhaled by other people.

What are the symptoms?

- The symptoms are typically a sudden onset of vomiting and/or diarrhoea. Symptoms usually appear 12 - 48 hours after being infected.
- The illness lasts for a specific length of time whether or not it is treated, with symptoms usually present for 12 - 60 hours.
- People infected may be able to pass the virus to others for up to 48 hours before they have symptoms.
- Some people suffer from a raised temperature, headaches and aching limbs.

Most people make a full recovery within one to two days.

The elderly and the very young are the most vulnerable and may need hospital treatment for dehydration.

What causes outbreaks of norovirus?

Outbreaks can occur because the virus is very infectious and is easily spread from person to person. Also it can survive in the environment for many days.

There are also many different strains of Norovirus, and immunity is short-lived. This means that people are very susceptible to contracting Norovirus especially in semi-closed environments such as hospitals, schools and offices.

How can these outbreaks be controlled?

Outbreaks can be difficult to control and last for a long time because the virus is so easily transmitted.

The most effective way to control outbreaks in hospital is to restrict staff and patient movement from the affected area and reduce the number of visitors. This usually means closing the ward to new patients.

Patients infected by norovirus should be isolated for a further 48 hours after their symptoms have ceased.

It is also very important to maintain high standards of hygiene, especially with hand washing and by being particularly careful when handling food.

Thorough hand washing with soap and water is the best way to prevent the spread of infection. Hands must always be washed after going to the toilet, or helping someone else to the toilet and before eating.

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Compassion Excellence Collaboration

Large print copies and alternative language versions of this leaflet can be made available on request.

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How is norovirus treated?

There is no specific treatment for norovirus apart from letting the illness run its course. It is important to drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration. The elderly or the very young may need hospital treatment if they become dehydrated.

I am suffering from norovirus, how can I prevent others from becoming infected?

- Quarantine yourself until you have been symptom-free for 48 hours.
- If you have an outpatient appointment either when you are symptomatic or within the 48 hour period, please contact the relevant department to arrange another date.
- Do not come to the hospital as a visitor.
- If you are a patient you must tell staff that you have, or have recently had diarrhoea and/or vomiting.
- Good hand washing with soap and water is important to prevent the spread of Norovirus (alcohol gel is not effective).
- Use bleach on sinks and toilets at home if a member of the family has diarrhoea and/or vomiting.

Will I be admitted to hospital if I have norovirus?

Norovirus infection is normally short-lived. If your symptoms persist longer than three days without any improvement or if you, or someone you are caring for, are showing signs of dehydration, then you should contact your GP. In the vast majority of cases, admission to hospital is not necessary.

Am I allowed to visit if I am unwell?

If you have Norovirus, any tummy bug, or coughs and colds, please do not visit friends or relatives who are patients in the hospital.

In emergency or critical situations, please contact the relevant department for further advice.

We hope you can be reassured by the information contained in this leaflet, and understand that the measures being taken are part of our continued commitment to the prevention and control of infection within Royal Papworth Hospital.

Further information

Please do not hesitate to ask a member of the ward staff in the first instance if you have any further questions, or ask to contact a member of the infection prevention and control team,

Tel: **01223 638052**

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