



HEALTH CARE AGENCY/PUBLIC HEALTH ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH INFORMATIONAL BULLETIN

Spotlight on Norovirus



In the U.S., norovirus is the leading cause of illness from contaminated food or water – but food isn't the only way people get this illness. It also spreads easily from person to person and spreads quickly in groups of people.

Examples of foods that have caused norovirus illness are fruits, vegetables, meats, and salads prepared or handled by an infected person. Oysters grown in contaminated water is another example.



Symptoms usually start within 1 or 2 days of eating the contaminated food, but may start in as few as 12 hours. Vomiting that's explosive and projectile is often the first symptom, along with watery diarrhea that isn't bloody, and cramps. Headache, mild fever, and muscle aches also may occur.

Most people get better in a day or two, although it takes others a little longer. Occasionally, some people lose so much body fluid that it throws off the body's balance of some important minerals (called electrolytes) and fluid, which can cause serious health problems. These people need to be treated by a health professional, and sometimes need to be hospitalized. Antibiotics don't work against this or other viruses (they only work against bacteria), but health professionals can give the right fluids and minerals to put the body back in balance.



You can help protect yourself and others against norovirus by following some basic food-safety tips:

1. Since norovirus is also spread from person to person, especially in crowded living situations such as dormitories, nursing homes, day-care centers, prisons, and cruise ships, handwashing is especially important. Norovirus spreads easily to things people touch, and other people can pick up the virus that way. It takes very little norovirus to cause illness.



Although alcohol-based antibacterial hand gels work against many harmful bacteria, they don't protect against norovirus. The virus may continue to pass in bowel movements even after symptoms have gone away – another reason to make handwashing a healthy habit.



2. When you are sick, do not prepare food or care for others who are sick. You should not prepare food for others for at least 2 to 3 days after you recover. This also applies to sick workers in settings such as schools and daycares where they may expose people to norovirus.
3. Clean and disinfect any contaminated surfaces. After throwing up or having diarrhea, immediately clean and disinfect contaminated surfaces with a chlorine bleach solution.

Chlorine bleach concentrations and mixing instructions:

200 ppm (parts per million) - 1:250 dilution

- Use for stainless steel, food/mouth contact items, toys
- 1 Tablespoon of bleach in 1-gallon water

1000 ppm (parts per million) - 1:50 dilution

- Use for non-porous surfaces, tile floors, counter-tops, sinks, toilets
- 1/3-cup bleach in 1-gallon water

5000 ppm (parts per million) - 1:10 dilution

- Use for porous surfaces, wooden floors
- 1 and ½ cup bleach in 1-gallon water



**Warning: chlorine bleach may damage fabrics and other surfaces. Please spot-test the area before applying to visible surfaces.*

Preparation is important. Be sure to use disposable gloves, a mask, a form of eye protection and protective clothing while thoroughly cleaning. Keep children away from the area before cleaning and as you clean.

Leave the bleach solution on the surface for 10 to 20 minutes, and then rinse the area well with clean water. After the disinfection process is complete, close off the area, if possible, for at least one hour. If there are windows, air out the area.

If you have any other questions about norovirus, or food safety in general, contact us at (714) 433-6000 or visit www.ocfoodinfo.com or www.ochealthinfo.com/epi/noro.