

# NOROVIRUS

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### **What are noroviruses?**

Infection with norovirus affects the stomach and intestines, causing an illness called gastroenteritis. Noroviruses are not related to bacteria and parasites that can cause gastrointestinal illnesses.

### **What are the symptoms of infection with norovirus?**

Norovirus infection causes gastroenteritis, which is an inflammation of the stomach and the small and large intestines. The symptoms of gastroenteritis are nausea, vomiting, and/or diarrhea accompanied by abdominal cramps. Some people also complain of headache, fever/chills, and muscle aches. Symptoms are usually brief and last only 1 or 2 days. There is no evidence that sick persons can become long-term carriers of the virus, but the virus can be in the stool and vomit of infected persons, from the day they start to feel ill to as long as 2 weeks after they feel better.

### **How serious is norovirus gastroenteritis?**

Norovirus gastroenteritis is usually not a serious illness, and other than drinking liquids to prevent dehydration, there is no specific treatment. Most people recover completely within 1 to 2 days, with no long-term complications of norovirus illness. However, persons who are unable to drink enough liquids to replace those lost with vomiting and/or diarrhea may become dehydrated and require special medical attention.

### **How is norovirus spread?**

Noroviruses are found in the stool or vomit of infected people. Although the virus cannot multiply outside of human bodies, once on food or in water, it can cause illness. People can become infected with the virus in several ways, including the following:

- Eating food or drinking liquids that are contaminated with norovirus; food and drinks can very easily become contaminated with norovirus because the virus is so small and because it probably takes fewer than 100 norovirus particles to make a person sick. Food can be contaminated either by direct contact with contaminated hands or work surfaces that have been contaminated with stool or vomit, or by tiny droplets from nearby vomit that have traveled through the air and landed on food.
- Touching surfaces or objects contaminated with norovirus, and then placing their hand in their mouth;

- Having direct contact with another person who is infected and showing symptoms (For example, when caring for someone with the illness, or sharing foods or eating utensils with someone who is ill);

Outbreaks of norovirus gastroenteritis have occurred in places where people have consumed liquids and/or food prepared or handled by others infected with the virus. It is estimated that as many as half of all food-related outbreaks of illness may be caused by norovirus. In many of these cases, sick food handlers were thought to be implicated.

### **Recommended precautionary measures to prevent the Spread of norovirus gastroenteritis?**

- Because the virus continues to be present in the stool for as long as 2 to 3 weeks after the person feels better, strict hand washing after using the bathroom and before handling food items is important in preventing the spread of this virus.
- People who are sick with norovirus illness can often vomit violently, without warning, and the vomit is infectious; therefore, any surfaces near the vomit should be promptly cleaned and disinfected with bleach solution and then rinsed.
- Food items that may have become contaminated with norovirus should be thrown out.
- Linens (including clothes, towels, tablecloths, napkins) soiled to any extent with vomit or stool should be promptly washed at high temperature or discarded.
- Sick children and infants in diapers should be excluded from food preparation areas.

### **Can a person have norovirus gastroenteritis more than once?**

Yes, a person can be infected with norovirus more than once in their lifetime. This is because there are many different noroviruses, and being infected with one type does not prevent infection from another type later. For this reason, it is difficult to develop a vaccine against norovirus.

### **Who do I contact for more information?**

For more information, please contact the Dickinson-Iron District Health Department. The contact information is below. Also, the CDC website can be referenced at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).



### ***DICKINSON-IRON DISTRICT HEALTH DEPARTMENT***

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