



### Viral Gastroenteritis/Norovirus

Norovirus is a virus and the most common cause of viral gastroenteritis in the UK. Many people refer to it as gastric flu or winter vomiting. Prevention and control precautions as viral gastroenteritis is spread easily from person to person.

#### What are the symptoms?



- diarrhoea
- vomiting,
- feeling of sickness,
- abdominal/stomach cramps,
- headache, and/or
- low grade fever.

Symptoms usually begin around 12-48 hours after being infected with the virus.

Illness is usually of a short duration and most people are better within 48 hours with no long-term effects. However, some people, especially the elderly and those with existing long-term illnesses, may have symptoms that last longer.

#### Why causes outbreaks of viral gastroenteritis?



Viral gastroenteritis is easily spread from person to person and, without effective cleaning, the virus is able to survive in the environment for many days.

Outbreaks tend to affect people in hospitals, care homes, or where there are a large group of people.

An outbreak is defined as two or more people within the same clinical area who have similar symptoms of diarrhoea and/or vomiting within a 48-hour time period.

#### How is viral gastroenteritis spread?

The virus is presented in an infected person's vomit and faeces (stool). A person is infected after swallowing the virus which usually happens by a hand to mouth action e.g. when eating.

Viral gastroenteritis is spread by:

- Contaminated hands
- Contaminated surfaces and equipment.
- Contaminated food

### How is viral gastroenteritis managed?

Early detection of an outbreak will help reduce the spread of infection and the duration of the outbreak. It is important to refer to your local guidance.

To help reduce the spread of viral gastroenteritis, standard precautions should always be followed together with the following four key principles.

<b>1. Communication</b>	<b>2. Hand Hygiene</b>
<b>3. Isolation</b>	<b>4. Decontamination</b>

<b>1. Communication</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• If you suspect an outbreak, contact your manager immediately who will liaise with the appropriate agencies.</li><li>• Care homes should be closed to admissions and display a notice at the entrance informing visitors of the outbreak.</li><li>• During an outbreak, visitors should be discouraged from visiting.</li><li>• Ensure staff obtains stool specimens from all infected service users and staff to determine the cause of the outbreak.</li><li>• Contact the service user's GP if there are any health concerns e.g. dehydration, blood stained diarrhoea.</li></ul>
<b>2. Hand Hygiene</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Wash hands with liquid soap and warm water, as alcohol hand rub is not effective at killing viral gastroenteritis.</li><li>• Liquid soap and paper towels should be available for staff in all rooms.</li><li>• Encourage hand-washing after using the toilet and before meals.</li><li>• Visitors should wash hands on entering and leaving.</li></ul>
<b>3. Isolation</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Where possible, infected people should be cared for in single room accommodation until symptom free for 48 hours.</li><li>• Disposable aprons and gloves should be worn when in direct contact with someone who has symptoms and when dealing with diarrhoea and vomiting.</li><li>• Affected care homes can reopen to new admissions when everyone is symptom free for more than 48 hours and a deep clean of all affected and communal areas has taken place.</li><li>• People cared for in their own home should be encouraged to remain at home until they are symptom free for 48 hours.</li><li>• Infected staff should remain off duty until symptom free for 48 hours.</li></ul>

#### 4. Decontamination

- Equipment used on infected people should be disinfected using chlorine based disinfectant solution, at least twice daily.
- Commonly touched surfaces e.g. toilets, taps, door handles, handrails etc should be cleaned as a priority and a fresh solution should be made every 24 hours.
- Toilets and commodes should be dedicated to each service user who has symptoms and cleaned after each use with chlorine based disinfectant solution.
- Open windows to help remove the virus from the air.

#### Test your knowledge

*Please tick the correct answer*

	True	False
1. Infected staff should remain off duty until symptom free for 48 hours.		
2. Alcohol hand rub is effective at killing viral gastroenteritis.		

#### Remember:

- Alcohol hand rub is not effective at killing viral gastroenteritis. Hands should be washed with liquid soap and warm water using the correct technique.

#### Factsheet Activity *Please tick appropriate box when activity has been completed*

Check that colleagues are aware that if they have had symptoms of diarrhoea and/or vomiting, they should be symptom free for 48 hours before returning to work.	
Ensure that chlorine based disinfectant solution is available in your place of work.	
Encourage service users to practice good hand hygiene after using the toilet.	