

IPC Advice Bulletin for Care Homes

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NOROVIRUS ALERT

To support Care Home staff, here is some information on good infection prevention and control (IPC) practice.

Numerous hospitals and care homes across the UK have recently been affected by closures due to Norovirus. Predictions are that it could be one of the worst years for outbreaks of diarrhoea and vomiting, especially over Christmas and the winter months. The following advice will help you in preventing and controlling the spread of Norovirus in your Care Home.

What is Norovirus?

Norovirus is the most common cause of viral gastroenteritis and around 1 million people are affected in the UK every year. People often refer to it as 'gastric flu' or 'winter vomiting'. It is highly infectious and can easily spread from person-to-person.

What are the symptoms of Norovirus?

- Sudden onset of diarrhoea and or vomiting, vomiting can be projectile (forceful).
- Nausea.
- Abdominal/stomach cramps.
- Headache, low grade fever.

Most people feel better within 48 hours; however, elderly people with existing long term illnesses may have symptoms for longer.

How is it spread?

The virus is present in an affected person's diarrhoea or vomit (D&V). A person is infected after swallowing the virus, this usually happens by transferring the virus from hand-to-mouth, e.g., putting your fingers in your mouth when eating.

Can be spread by:

- contaminated hands of residents and staff
- contaminated surfaces and equipment
- contaminated food.

What can you do?

If you have a resident with unexplained diarrhoea and or vomiting, implement control measures immediately as this will help prevent an outbreak if it is Norovirus, so:

don't delay - implement straight away!

If you have 2 or more residents with symptoms, contact your local IPC Team or Public Health England (PHE) for advice.

- If possible, isolate affected residents in their room until they are symptom free for 48 hours.
- Hand washing with liquid soap and warm water is essential after caring for a resident with symptoms of D&V. Alcohol handrubs are **not** effective at killing the virus so should **not** be used.

- Disposable apron and gloves should be worn when caring for a resident with symptoms. These should be removed and disposed of in the room and hands washed before leaving. Hands should then be washed again.
- Gloves should always be removed first then the apron.
- Commonly touched surfaces such as hand rails, toilet flush handles, door knobs, should be disinfected with Milton at a dilution of 1 in 20, e.g., 50ml of Milton in 1 litre water, at least twice daily. Do not use your routine cleaning products as they will not be effective at killing Norovirus.
- It is essential that residents do not become dehydrated, so oral fluids should be encouraged.
- Norovirus is a self-limiting illness and does not require treatment or hospital admission.
- If a resident requires urgent admission due to an unrelated illness, the hospital should be informed of the outbreak even if the resident has not had any symptoms.
- Visitors should be informed of the outbreak and advised of the risks and where possible discouraged from visiting. An Infection Prevention and Control Policy on Viral Gastroenteritis can be downloaded from our website www.infectionpreventioncontrol.co.uk. All staff should be aware of and follow the policy.

Staff who develop symptoms

- Staff who develop symptoms should submit a sample of diarrhoea and remain off work until symptom free for 48 hours. If symptoms develop whilst at work they should not remain on duty.
- Avoid going to your GP as this may spread the virus to others, stay at home and drink plenty of water and rest.

During this period of increased incidence of Norovirus to help prevent an outbreak occurring, consider enhancing your routine cleaning by using Milton at least daily for commonly touched surfaces.

It is important to raise awareness with visitors that if they have been ill with D&V they should not visit until they are symptom free for 48 hours to prevent passing the illness on to others in the home.