

Viral gastroenteritis Factsheet

Information for residents and visitors

What causes viral gastroenteritis?

Diarrhoea and/or vomiting (viral gastroenteritis) is usually due to Norovirus. This virus is also known as Norwalk, winter vomiting, or gastric flu. It is a stomach bug responsible for causing diarrhoea and/or vomiting in people and causes outbreaks in hospitals, care homes and schools.

Why is it a problem?

Norovirus spreads very easily due to the close contact between residents and staff. Large numbers of residents and staff can be affected and it is important to stop the illness from spreading to others.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of viral gastroenteritis usually last for 2-3 days and include nausea, diarrhoea and/or vomiting. People often feel generally unwell with a raised temperature, headache and aching limbs. The illness is usually mild and gets better without antibiotics.

The incubation period (time taken from catching the bug to becoming unwell) is usually from 1 to 2 days and people remain infectious for at least 48 hours after their symptoms have stopped.

Where does the virus come from and how is it spread?

The main source of infection is from an infected resident, member of staff or a visitor. The virus is usually spread from the vomit of a sick person. When vomiting occurs a fine mist containing the virus is introduced into the air and can be easily spread to others in a wide area. Similar spread can occur from diarrhoea.

How can I prevent becoming infected?

The most important way to prevent infection is to wash your hands with liquid soap and warm running water or use non-alcohol skin wipes:

- Before eating and drinking
- After going to the toilet

Alcohol handrub or wipes should **not** be used as they will not kill the virus.

In a care home setting, if you do become unwell, you should stay in your room until symptoms have settled for 72 hours, this will help to prevent the illness spreading to others.

Will I need treatment?

Antibiotics are not needed to treat viral gastroenteritis. The main treatment is making sure you drink plenty of fluids, unless you have been medically advised to restrict your fluid intake.

Can I have visitors?

Visitors should be informed of the problem and we would recommend that they are discouraged from visiting to prevent them from acquiring the infection. Children should be discouraged from visiting as they may be particularly susceptible to the virus. Friends or relatives that are unwell or suffering from diarrhoea and/or vomiting should **not** visit until they have been symptom free for 48 hours.

Do visitors need to take special precautions if they visit?

Visitors should wash their hands thoroughly with liquid soap and warm running water on entering the home, before leaving your room and before leaving the home. It is advisable to keep the number of visitors to a minimum as they may pick up the virus when visiting.

Alcohol handrub or wipes should **not** be used as they will not kill the virus.