



# Cape May County Department of Health

## 6 Moore Road, Cape May Court House, NJ 08210

## Norovirus Fact Sheet

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### What is norovirus?

Noroviruses are a group of viruses (previously called Norwalk-like viruses) that can cause gastroenteritis, or inflammation of the stomach and intestines. This infection is often referred to as the “stomach flu,” although it is not related to the flu, which is a respiratory illness caused by the influenza virus.

### What are the symptoms?

Common symptoms of norovirus infection include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and stomach cramping. Less common symptoms can include a low-grade fever or chills, headache, and muscle aches. Symptoms usually begin 1 or 2 days after exposure to the virus and will last about 1 to 2 days in most people. The illness typically comes on suddenly. The infected person may feel very sick and vomit often, sometimes without warning, many times a day. Dehydration can be a concern in the very young, elderly, and persons with weakened immune systems.

### How is norovirus spread?

Norovirus is highly contagious and must be swallowed to cause infection. The virus is found in the stool (feces) or vomit of infected persons. From there, the virus is transferred to food, water, or surfaces by the hands of infected people who have not washed adequately after using the bathroom. Some people may continue to shed virus in the stool for up to 2 weeks after symptoms resolve.

People become infected with norovirus by:

- Eating food or drinking liquids contaminated by an infected person.
- Eating uncooked shellfish that has been harvested from contaminated waters.
- Close contact with an infected person.
- Touching contaminated surfaces or objects and then touching the mouth or eating without washing the hands first.

Persons working in day-care centers or nursing homes should pay special attention to children or residents who have norovirus illness. This virus can spread rapidly in these environments.

### How is norovirus diagnosed?

Norovirus is often diagnosed based on symptoms and illness duration, but a physician can order a stool test to confirm norovirus infection.

### How is norovirus treated?

There is no specific treatment. Norovirus cannot be treated with antibiotics and people usually get better without medical attention in 1-2 days. There is a risk for dehydration due to vomiting and diarrhea so it is important to drink plenty of fluids. If symptoms persist or worsen, contact your health care provider.

### How can I prevent norovirus infections?

Follow the tips below to prevent infection with norovirus as well as other diseases:

- Wash your hands with warm, soapy water before eating or preparing food, after using the bathroom, and after changing diapers.
- Make sure food preparation areas are clean before use.
- Cook food completely. Wash all fruits and vegetables before eating.
- After episodes of vomiting or diarrhea clean contaminated surfaces immediately with a bleach-based household cleaner.
- If you are caring for someone with norovirus illness, wash your hands frequently with soap and water, particularly after cleaning the bathroom, helping the person use the bathroom, changing diapers, and handling soiled laundry.
- Do not allow ill persons to prepare food until at least 3 days after symptoms resolve.

### Are there any special restrictions?

Yes. Because norovirus is highly contagious, persons who work in healthcare, daycare settings, and who prepare food cannot work while infectious. The Health Department provides guidance to these establishments.

**If you are concerned about your health, contact your personal healthcare provider.**

Adapted from CDC, Massachusetts and Minnesota Departments of Public Health, Control of Communicable Disease Manual, 18<sup>th</sup> edition

For more information contact the Cape May County Department of Health at 465-1200 or [www.cmchealth.net](http://www.cmchealth.net)