

NOROVIRUS

A lot of people in the area are currently suffering from this virus. It causes a condition known as "Winter Vomiting Disease". This leaflet helps to explain the features of the illness, and what to do if you have caught it.

What is it?

Noroviruses are a group of viruses that are the most common cause of stomach bugs in the UK, affecting all ages. It is estimated that between 600,000 and a million people in the UK become infected each year. Noroviruses are also sometimes known as "winter vomiting viruses" or "Norwalk-like viruses".

What are the symptoms?

Around 12 to 48 hours after becoming infected, the virus causes sudden onset of nausea followed by projectile vomiting and watery diarrhoea. Some people may have a fever, headaches and aching limbs - often leading people to call the illness "stomach flu". The illness is not generally dangerous and most people make a full recovery within one to two days. However, the very old and very young risk becoming dehydrated which may require hospital treatment. Vomiting is usually the most prominent symptom. There are no laboratory tests required – the diagnosis is made on the clinical features.

How does it spread?

The virus is easily transmitted from one person to another by contact with an infected person or through contaminated food or drink or touching contaminated surfaces or objects. It is able to survive in the environment for many days and outbreaks tend to affect more than 50% of susceptible people. Anyone is susceptible as immunity to the virus is not long-lasting. Outbreaks commonly occur in hospitals, nursing homes, schools and on cruise ships. It can be difficult to control because it is so easily spread but the best way is to disinfect contaminated areas, washing hands and to avoid handling food. Also, those who have been infected should be isolated for 48 hours after their symptoms have gone away.

What is the treatment?

There is no treatment other than to let the illness run its course. Those infected should drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration and practice good hygiene to reduce the risk of the illness spreading. It is important to drink watery fluids immediately after vomiting because it then has longer to be absorbed by the body before the next bout of vomiting. Also, taking Domperidone 10mg every 6 hours helps reduce the nausea and vomiting. This can be bought at the chemist without a prescription (24 tablets costs about £4). The diarrhoea, if it occurs, usually settles on its own.

How can I avoid WVD?

Good hygiene, particularly hand washing, is very important for preventing WVD especially in certain settings and communities e.g. nursing and residential homes, schools, nurseries, food establishments etc. The following precautions should be taken routinely:

- Wash hands with soap and warm water and dry thoroughly after toilet visits and before preparing or eating food.
- At home separate towels should be used which should be changed and washed frequently.

What special care should I take if I have WVD?

To prevent further spread of the virus it is also important that any equipment or furnishings contaminated with diarrhoea or vomit is cleaned thoroughly:

- A dilute solution of household bleach (follow manufacturers recommendations) is one of the most effective cleaning agents, although it should not be used on carpets or soft furnishings.
- The bleach solution can be used on items such as toilet seats, handles, doors and taps. It can also be used on hard floor surfaces.
- Soiled soft furnishings' covers should be washed in a machine at temperatures over 60 °C.
- Soiled carpets and fixed soft furnishings should be cleaned thoroughly with detergent and hot water and preferably steam cleaned.
- If you are suffering from any of the signs or symptoms of WVD, make sure you use a separate towel and flannel from the rest of the family. Wash and change towels frequently.
- Take particular care when changing the nappies of children who are ill. Always wash your hands after changing nappies.

How long should I stay off work or school?

- Most adults should stay away from work until they are feeling better.
- If you are working in food handling/food preparation or with vulnerable groups such as the young, old, pregnant or immunocompromised, you should tell your employer about the illness. You should not return to work until you have been symptom free for two days and your stools are back to normal.
- Children attending a school, nursery, playgroup or child minder can return once they have been symptom free for two days and feel well enough.
- Adults working in a school, nursery, playgroup or as child minders can return once they have been symptom free for two days and feel well enough.

With acknowledgement to BBC Health, SW London Health Protection Unit and Health Protection Agency.

For further information and links visit:

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/7169688.stm>

<http://www.hpa.org.uk/>

www.wandsworth-pct.nhs.uk/pdf/factsheets/WinterVomitingSRSV_NLV.pdf

