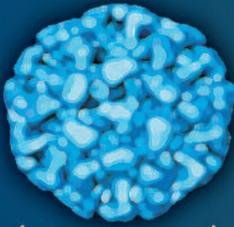


What is viral gastroenteritis?



(Norovirus)

Gastroenteritis means inflammation of the wall of the stomach (gastro) and intestines (enteritis). Within health care institutions, viral gastroenteritis is often caused by a family of viruses called noroviruses. Noroviruses are highly contagious thus it is not unusual to observe viral gastroenteritis outbreaks among patients in health care settings.

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Source : Mesures de contrôle et prévention des éclosons de cas de gastroentérite d'allure virale (Norovirus) à l'intention des établissements de soins, INSPQ, juin 2005

Developed by the Direction de santé publique

Information on viral GASTROENTERITIS

FOR PATIENTS
AND THEIR FAMILY



What are the symptoms?

The main symptoms of viral gastroenteritis are nausea, vomiting, diarrhea and abdominal cramps. Symptoms usually appear quite suddenly, and generally within 24 to 48 hours following infection with a virus that causes gastroenteritis. A low-grade fever may be present.

Who gets viral gastroenteritis?

Noroviruses can infect people of all ages, and infections can occur more than once in a lifetime.

Is viral gastroenteritis a serious illness?

Viral gastroenteritis caused by noroviruses is generally not a serious illness, although infected people may feel very ill and vomit often. The majority of people who get viral gastroenteritis completely recover in a few days without any serious complications. However, medical attention may be necessary for infected persons who become dehydrated due to an inability to drink enough fluids to replace what was lost through vomiting and diarrhea.

How are these viruses spread?

Noroviruses are highly contagious and easily spread from person-to-person. An infected person's stools and vomitus contain large quantities of the virus, and can contaminate an infected person's hands and environmental surfaces. There are different ways to become infected:

- by close contact with infected persons or by touching contaminated objects or surfaces and then transferring the virus to the mouth from the hands;
- by eating or drinking contaminated foods or beverages.

How long can infected persons transmit the virus?

Infected persons can transmit the virus from the beginning of symptoms and until at least 48 hours after the end of symptoms.

How is transmission of viral gastroenteritis prevented?

- **Frequent handwashing is the simplest and most effective way to prevent transmission for an infected person and his or her relatives. Regular handwashing should occur:**
 - after going to the washroom or changing a diaper;
 - before and after taking care of an ill person;
 - after cleaning materials, objects or surfaces contaminated with either stools or vomitus;
 - before preparing a meal or eating.

- Contaminated surfaces, particularly in the washroom, should be immediately cleaned and disinfected with a chlorine bleach solution (a dilution of 1 part 5-6% commercial chlorine bleach to 10 parts water) prepared within the last 24 hours. The bleach solution should be left on the contaminated surfaces for 10 minutes.
- Contaminated clothing, sheets or other fabrics should be immediately removed and washed in hot water with detergent.
- **Infected persons should refrain from visiting ill relatives or anyone living in a health care institution until at least 48 hours after the symptoms disappear.**

What measures are taken within a health care institution to limit transmission?

The following control measures are implemented in health care institutions once a case of viral gastroenteritis is present:

- frequent handwashing by the staff, the infected person and his or her visitors, before and after leaving the patient's room;
- isolation of the infected person in his or her room.
- Measures taken by staff:
 - wearing gloves, gown and mask when vomitus is present;
 - the use of dedicated equipment and materials to care for the infected person;
 - cleaning and disinfecting of the environment.
- Measures taken by visitors:
 - handwashing and wearing of gloves and/or a gown when visiting an infected person, specifically if the visitor is assisting with patient care;
 - restrictions on the number of visits.

How is viral gastroenteritis treated?

Viral gastroenteritis cannot be treated with antibiotics. Treatment consists mostly of preventing dehydration. Rehydration products with equalized amounts of water, sugar and mineral salts can be purchased at the pharmacy. In the meantime, the Info-Santé line can be contacted for further advice.

Depending on the infected person's tolerance, he or she can resume a regular diet but should begin with juice, clear soups or more consistent soups. It is recommended to eat lightly and to alternate with a rehydration solution.

For further inquiries, please contact your local CLSC's Info-Santé line or consult your family physician.