

Preventing the spread of viral gastroenteritis (norovirus)

Infection Prevention

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Information for Patients

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Introduction

Gastroenteritis is a very common condition which causes diarrhoea and sickness and can happen for a number of different reasons, including taking certain medication and antibiotics which affects the lining of the stomach, various underlying medical conditions, or due to an infection. It is an inflammation of the stomach and small intestine and it is estimated that about 20% of the UK population have gastroenteritis each year.

Viral gastroenteritis is a particular type of gastroenteritis. In adults it is often caused by a virus called norovirus, also known as the 'winter vomiting bug'. Norovirus is very contagious and is easily spread from person to person. It is the most common stomach bug in the UK. If you have ever had gastroenteritis for 1 or 2 days, it's likely that it was caused by norovirus. It is most common in the winter months but can happen at any time of year. Viral gastroenteritis in children is sometimes caused by a virus called rotavirus.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms start 12 to 48 hours after coming into contact with the virus and usually last for 24 to 72 hours. You may have one or more of these symptoms:

- A high temperature
- Diarrhoea
- Feeling sick (nausea)
- Being sick (vomiting)
- Tummy (abdominal/ stomach) pain
- Aching muscles
- Headache

**Health information and support is available at www.nhs.uk
or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice**

Visit www.leicestershospitals.nhs.uk for maps and information about visiting Leicester's Hospitals
To give feedback about this information sheet, contact InformationForPatients@uhl-tr.nhs.uk

How does it spread?

Norovirus spreads very easily where there is close contact between people, such as in schools, hotels, cruise ships, nursing homes and in hospitals. You can catch viral gastroenteritis from:

- close contact with an infected person.
- touching surfaces or objects that have the virus on them, then touching your mouth.
- having food or drink contaminated with particles of the virus.

How does this affect me?

A diagnosis of norovirus is usually made by looking at the symptoms you have, but a sample of your poo (stool) may need to be sent to the laboratory for testing to confirm this. If you become unwell during your hospital stay, you may be moved to a single room or to a bay with other patients who have the same symptoms, until you have had no more diarrhoea or vomiting for 48 hours.

It may not always be possible to provide you with en-suite toilet facilities, but a dedicated commode will be provided in your room or a dedicated toilet allocated to you on the main ward.

Visiting may be restricted and any visitors will need to clean their hands before and after seeing you. Visitors should ask for advice from the nursing staff about bringing in food, as food will need to be thrown away when the single room or bay is thoroughly cleaned after an outbreak.

Will these viruses do me any harm?

If you have vomiting and diarrhoea it can be very draining, but these usually don't last long. Vomiting and diarrhoea can cause dehydration, which can be a problem especially if you are unable to replace fluids that have been lost.

Will I need treatment?

You should get better without treatment after 2 to 3 days. Antibiotics are not needed to treat norovirus. You should make sure you drink plenty of fluids to maintain good hydration.

Why is the ward restricted/ closed to admissions?

Norovirus spreads easily and can survive for several days on surfaces and objects when touched by an infected person. It often causes outbreaks of gastroenteritis in healthcare settings due to the contact between patients and staff, and large numbers of patients and staff can be involved.

That means it is more likely to affect patients, hospital visitors, and healthcare workers. It can cause major disruption in hospitals because of the actions that need to be taken to reduce the spread of the virus, and because staff can become ill as well.

The best way to prevent the spread of norovirus is to stop new patients from being admitted to an area; this may be a bay or the whole ward. Other steps (such as the use of aprons and gloves) will be used for each separate patient and all staff must clean their hands when entering and leaving your room/ bay.

The ward will be restricted or closed until 48 hours after the last person with symptoms. It will then be thoroughly cleaned and re-opened to admissions.

Can I have visitors?

We would recommend that visitors are kept to a minimum whilst you have symptoms, to prevent them from catching the virus. There may be visitor restrictions to help manage the situation, when a ward or bay is restricted or closed. Please discuss this with the nurse in charge.

All visitors are at risk, but the elderly and young children, in particular, should avoid visiting as they are more likely to pick up the virus.

Friends and relatives who have had diarrhoea or sickness (vomiting) themselves, are unwell, or who have a low immunity should not visit until you have had 48 hours without symptoms.

Your visitors do not need to wear gloves or an apron when visiting you, but they must clean their hands before visiting using alcohol hand sanitiser. They must also wash their hands thoroughly with soap and water before leaving the bay/ single room and use alcohol hand sanitiser before exiting the ward.

If you are a patient with no symptoms of diarrhoea or sickness, your visitors must still follow the instructions for hand hygiene as described above.

Further instructions for visitors:

- To prevent the spread of infection whilst you have symptoms, visitors should avoid socialising with other patients.
- During an outbreak, visitors are advised not to eat or drink during their visit.
- Visitors should ask for advice from the nursing staff about bringing in food, as food will need to be thrown away when the single room or bay is thoroughly cleaned after an outbreak.
- If your visitor has to visit other areas of the hospital, the affected ward should be visited last.
- Visitors should sit on chairs provided by the ward. They should not sit on your bed or put their feet on your bed, as this brings in germs from outside and you could then pick them up on your hands.
- Visitors on adult wards should ask ward staff where the nearest public toilet is and should not use patient toilets.
- If visitors have any concerns about visiting, please discuss this with a doctor or nurse.

What is the hospital doing to prevent the spread of infection?

- Closure of bays or whole wards as soon as patients are identified as potentially having this infection.
- Staff will wear protective clothing, such as gloves and an apron.
- Regular hand hygiene routine for all healthcare staff.
- Restricting movement in and out of the ward, including the number of staff entering the ward.
- Stopping discharges to other care facilities to prevent the spread of infection to patients in care homes and other hospitals.
- Thorough cleaning of the area.

Which is the best way to clean hands?

Alcohol hand gels only work on clean hands and are not as good at killing norovirus as washing hands with soap and water.

You can use alcohol hand sanitiser after washing your hands, but we do not recommend using the hand sanitiser alone in areas where there is an outbreak of viral gastroenteritis.

What extra steps do I need to take at home?

- If you are still feeling unwell and have symptoms, stay at home and make sure you follow good hand hygiene.
- Family members should wash their hands regularly, especially before handling food, before eating, after using the toilet, and handling dirty linen or clothing.
- Your laundry can be washed normally with the rest of your household wash unless soiled with body fluids; then it is best to wash separately using the hottest temperature recommended on the washing care labels. Tumble drying (if possible) can help to kill most germs.
- Use separate towels and flannels from other household members.
- Make sure your toilet is cleaned properly after use, using a bleach solution.
- Surfaces in bathrooms, kitchens and other areas should be cleaned on a regular basis with household detergents/ disinfectants.
- Take care when changing nappies or cleaning up after someone who has been sick, or had diarrhoea.

If you have any other questions or concerns please ask the nursing staff, or they can arrange for you to speak to a member of the Infection Prevention Team.

Preventing the spread of infection at Leicester's Hospitals

To reduce the risk of healthcare associated infections across our hospitals we have a dedicated Infection Prevention Team (0116 258 5448) and policies which are evidence based and regularly reviewed. We closely monitor infection rates across our hospitals and any risks and trends are reported to our Infection Prevention Assurance Committee, our Board of Directors and Public Health England.

اگر آپ کو یہ معلومات کسی اور زبان میں درکار ہیں، تو براہ کرم مندرجہ ذیل نمبر پر ٹیلی فون کریں۔
على هذه المعلومات بلغة أخرى، الرجاء الاتصال على رقم الهاتف الذي يظهر في الأسفل

જો તમને અન્ય ભાષામાં આ માહિતી જોઈતી હોય, તો નીચે આપેલ નંબર પર કૃપા કરી ટેલિફોન કરો

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