

# Preventing the spread of viral gastroenteritis - tummy bug (norovirus)

Infection Prevention

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Information for Patients

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## What is gastroenteritis?

Gastroenteritis (tummy bug) is a very common infection, affecting 1 in 5 people each year of all ages. It is an infection of the gut (intestine) which cause diarrhoea (loose/watery poo) and vomiting (sickness). Gastroenteritis (tummy bug) in adults is often caused by a virus called norovirus, also known as the winter vomiting bug. Norovirus is the most common stomach bug in the UK. It is most common in the winter months but can happen at any time of year. Most cases of gastroenteritis in children are caused by a virus called rotavirus.

## How does it spread?

Gastroenteritis (tummy bug), when caused by viruses like **norovirus** or **rotavirus**, spreads easily to many people through:

- **Direct contact with someone who has norovirus/rotavirus.** For example, shaking hands or caring for someone who is ill.
- **Contaminated food or water.** Eating food or drinking water that has viral particles, especially raw or undercooked shellfish.
- **Touching contaminated surfaces or objects.** The virus can survive on surfaces like door handles, toilets, and phones.
- **Airborne particles from vomiting.** Rarely, the virus can be inhaled if someone vomits forcefully nearby.
- **Close proximity outbreaks.** Common in places like hospitals, schools, care homes, cruise ships, and military bases because of close contact and shared facilities.

Health information and support is available at [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)  
or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice

Visit [www.uhleicester.nhs.uk](http://www.uhleicester.nhs.uk) for maps and information about visiting Leicester's Hospitals  
To give feedback about this information sheet, contact [uhl-tr.informationforpatientsmailbox@nhs.net](mailto:uhl-tr.informationforpatientsmailbox@nhs.net)

## What are the symptoms?

Symptoms start 12 to 48 hours (2 days) after coming into contact with the virus. It often lasts for 1 to 3 days. You may have 1 or more of these symptoms:

- A high temperature (fever)
- Diarrhoea (loose/watery poo)
- Feeling sick (nausea)
- Being sick (vomiting)
- Tummy pain (stomach cramps)
- Aching muscles

## How do I know if I have it?

We will need a sample of your diarrhoea (poo) to look for the infection norovirus or rotavirus. The test result will take up to 1 day.

## Will I need treatment?

There is no specific treatment for gastroenteritis infections. Symptoms of diarrhoea (loose/water poo) and vomiting (sickness) often last for 2 to 3 days. You should make sure you drink plenty of fluids to maintain good hydration.

## During your stay in hospital:

Norovirus and rotavirus infections spread really easily and can be difficult to control. Many people can become sick quickly causing outbreaks in our hospitals. To help stop the spread of infection, we will need to do the following actions until symptoms of diarrhoea (loose/liquid poo) and vomiting (sickness) have stopped for 48 hours (2 days):

- We will move you to a side room or a bay with other patients who have the same infection.
- Close the bay or whole ward to stop the infection from spreading and keep people safe.
- Staff will wear protective clothing, such as gloves and apron when caring for you or cleaning.
- Hand hygiene. Cleaning hands with soap and water. Alcohol hand gels (sanitiser) only work on clean hands and are not as good at killing norovirus.
- Limit movement in and out of the ward, including the number of staff entering the ward.
- Family and friends can still visit, but visits may need to be limited. Please see: "Information for visitors" on page 3 for details.
- Stop discharges to other care facilities to prevent the spread of infection to patients in care homes and other hospitals.
- Thorough cleaning of the bay and ward.

## How can you help prevent the spread of infection?

Norovirus/rotavirus infections can spread very easily from person to person. The most important way to stop the spread of infection is by hand washing with soap and water.

By cleaning your hands at the following times, you will help stop the spread of germs and help keep yourself and other patients safe from infection. Do not forget to encourage children to clean their hands too. Wash your hands:

- before eating or handling/preparing food
- before taking medication
- before and after touching a patient
- before leaving the ward bay or single room
- after using the toilet
- after changing a nappy
- after removing gloves
- after blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing

## Information for visitors:

To help prevent the spread of infection:

- Limit visitors while you have symptoms. There may be restrictions. Please speak to the nurse in charge about this.
- Elderly, young children, or people with a reduced ability to fight infection should avoid visiting.
- Anyone who has had diarrhoea or vomiting should not visit until 48 hours (2 days) after symptoms have stopped.
- Visitors only need to wear gloves or aprons if they are helping with your personal care. This could be helping you use the toilet or having a wash/shower.
- You must use alcohol hand sanitiser before entering the ward.
- You must use hand sanitiser again before exiting the ward.
- Even if you have no symptoms, visitors must follow these hand hygiene steps.
- Visitors should avoid socialising with other patients.
- During outbreaks, no eating or drinking during visits on the ward.
- Check with nursing staff before bringing food. Keep food covered like biscuits, cakes, sweets and fruit. Food may need to be discarded during cleaning.
- If visitors are seeing other people in hospital/nursing homes on the same day it is best if they see you last.
- Visitors must sit on ward-provided chairs, not on beds or place feet on beds.
- Use public toilets, not patient/ward toilets. Ask staff for directions.
- For any concerns, visitors should speak to a doctor or nurse.



## Leaving hospital:

To help protect yourself and others, please follow the advice below:

- If you are still feeling unwell and have symptoms, stay at home. Wash your hands with soap and water after using the toilet and before handling or eating food.
- Family members should wash their hands regularly, especially before handling food, before eating, after using the toilet, and handling dirty linen or clothing.
- You can wash your clothes like normal with the rest of the household washing, unless soiled with body fluids (vomit/poo). You must then wash it separately following the clothes washing label instructions. Use your normal washing powder or liquid.
- 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 (vomit), or had diarrhea (loose/liquid poo).
- If you have any other questions or concerns please ask the nursing staff on your ward.

## Infection Prevention at Leicester's Hospitals

To reduce the risk of healthcare associated infections across our hospitals we have a dedicated Infection Prevention Team. They use policies which are evidence based and regularly reviewed. We closely monitor infection rates across our hospitals. Any risks and trends are reported to our Infection Prevention Assurance Committee, Board of Directors and UK Health Security Agency.

## Contact details:

Infection Prevention Team: **0116 258 5448**

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