



Collingwood General & Marine Hospital

Norwalk Virus Infection

What is Norwalk Virus infection?

Norwalk virus is a common cause of vomiting and diarrhea each winter and is often referred to as 'stomach flu' or 'Winter Vomiting Disease'. Norwalk virus infections have been linked to outbreaks of vomiting and/or diarrhea in institutions such as child-care centers, hospitals, schools and nursing homes.

How do people get Norwalk virus infection?

The Norwalk virus is found in stool (feces) and sometimes in the vomit of ill persons. The Norwalk virus is spread easily by a person coming into contact with the contaminated hands of an ill person or by objects touched by someone infected with the virus (e.g. door knobs, stair railings, etc.). Airborne transmission (e.g. when someone coughs or sneezes and does not cover their mouth) may be possible.

What are the signs and symptoms of Norwalk Virus Infection?

Most individuals with Norwalk virus infection will have 1 to 3 days of nausea, vomiting and watery diarrhea. Other symptoms may include fever and stomach cramps. Severe illness or hospitalization caused by Norwalk virus infection is uncommon. Infected individuals usually recover in 2 to 3 days without serious health effects. If diarrhea is bloody and/or accompanied with a high fever or if symptoms last longer than 72 hours, seek medical attention or call TeleHealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000 for advice.

How soon after exposure do symptoms of Norwalk virus infection appear?

Symptoms usually appear within 1 to 2 days after exposure to the virus.

How is Norwalk virus infection diagnosed?

A stool sample is required to test for and diagnose Norwalk virus infection. However, this is not recommended or necessary if the symptoms resolve in 2-3 days.

What is the treatment for Norwalk virus infection?

Persons should get bed rest and drink plenty of fluids. Persons who become severely dehydrated should seek medical attention.

Who is at risk for Norwalk virus infection?

Everyone! The symptoms of Norwalk virus infection may be more severe for older individuals, young children and those with underlying medical conditions who may become dehydrated due to vomiting and diarrhea.

How can the spread of Norwalk virus be prevented?

- Wash hands thoroughly for at least 15 seconds with soap and warm water after using the toilet and before preparing or eating food;
- Do not prepare food for others if you have symptoms of a Norwalk virus infection;
- Get plenty of rest and stay home until you are no longer infectious to others, which is a minimum of 48 hours after all symptoms have resolved.

Is there a Vaccine for Norwalk Virus?

No. There currently is no vaccine available in Canada to prevent Norwalk virus infections.

Is Norwalk Virus Infection “the flu”?

People often refer to the Norwalk virus infection as the “stomach flu”. However, influenza (the flu) is a much more serious respiratory illness with symptoms of abrupt onset of cough and high fever. The duration of illness is longer also - sometimes it takes weeks or months to fully recover.

Note: **The Norwalk Virus is not the same as the Virus that causes Influenza!**

What should you do if you think that you or a family member has been infected with Norwalk Virus infection?

- Do not attend work, school or daycare until you are no longer infectious to others, which is a minimum of 48 hours after all symptoms have resolved;
- Drink lots of fluids;
- Seek medical attention if symptoms persist;
- Frequently disinfect high traffic areas (e.g. taps, bathrooms, doorknobs, surfaces, etc.) with 1:10 diluted bleach and water solution;
- Do not visit hospitals or long term care facilities until you are no longer infectious to others, which is a minimum of 48 hours after all symptoms have resolved.