

Norovirus

What you can do to reduce the risk of becoming ill and spreading Norovirus.

What is norovirus?

Noroviruses are a group of viruses that cause the stomach flu, or gastroenteritis. It's also commonly known as the winter vomiting bug and is one of the most common causes of foodborne illness in the UK.

While the symptoms of norovirus can be unpleasant, it is considered a mild infection. This is because it is usually short-lived, and most people get better without medical treatment.

People who are most likely to suffer severe symptoms are young children, pregnant women, people with an underlying health condition (e.g. cancer, diabetes, liver and kidney disease) and older people.

You are most likely to catch norovirus by coming into contact with an infected person, but it can also be spread by contaminated food and poor hygiene (for example, not washing hands). Norovirus can't multiply in food but can survive in it for long periods of time. Outbreaks of norovirus have been caused by food handlers, contaminated oysters and fresh produce such as berries and salad.

You can find information on the symptoms of Norovirus and how it makes you ill on the following sites:

- [NHS - Norovirus](#)
- [NIDirect - Norovirus](#)
- [NHS 111 Wales - Norovirus](#)
- [UKHSA - How to stop norovirus spreading](#)

Video: FSA explains norovirus

FSA Explains

Viruses are tiny, often highly contagious pathogenic agents which cause disease. They are much smaller than and different to bacteria and parasites, though they can cause very similar illnesses.

Viruses can be spread between hosts in different ways such as through:

- bodily fluids - for example, HIV
- the air - for example, influenza
- ingestion - for example, norovirus

Unlike bacteria, viruses are not able to grow outside of their host. However, Norovirus can survive and remain infectious in foods and the environment for long periods of time and can often survive

under harsher conditions than bacteria.

How norovirus spreads

Norovirus is very contagious. It can contaminate food and water and enters the body by being ingested and inhaled through the mouth or nose. Norovirus causes infection once it has reached the gut.

It can also spread through contact with the faeces or vomit of an infected person.

To prevent you from passing norovirus on to your family and friends, it's vital that you follow good personal hygiene and cleaning practices as the virus can survive on surfaces for several months.

How you can reduce the risk of norovirus at home

Research has shown that norovirus is usually spread by infected people (e.g. food handlers who may be ill). If you can, avoid preparing food for others if you suspect you may have norovirus. If this is not possible, then it is vital that you take extra care follow strict personal hygiene practices when you are handling and preparing food. Cooking infected food properly destroys the virus but be careful to avoid cross contamination when serving.

It's also essential that you are careful about [cleaning](#) and [avoiding cross-contamination](#) when transporting, [preparing](#) and [storing food](#).

To reduce the risk of Norovirus, it's important to:

- [wash your hands](#) regularly with soap and water including before, during and after meal preparation and after going to the toilet
- handle food carefully in your kitchen and wash chopping boards and utensils to avoid [cross-contamination](#)
- [clean](#) surfaces properly to prevent harmful norovirus from spreading
- [cook food correctly](#) by following the instructions on time and temperature – proper cooking will kill norovirus present in the food