



The Clatterbridge
Cancer Centre
NHS Foundation Trust

Viral gastroenteritis

Infection Control



A guide for patients and visitors

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This information is for patients or for families and visitors who would like to know more about viral gastroenteritis.

This leaflet will answer some of the questions that patients frequently ask about viral gastroenteritis and will explain ways to treat people with the infection and prevent it from spreading.

Viral gastroenteritis is a frequent cause of diarrhoea and vomiting in the general population. One of the viruses which can cause gastroenteritis is called norovirus. Norovirus can occur at any time during the year, but it is renowned for causing infections during the winter months and you may have heard it called 'gastric flu', 'stomach flu' or 'winter vomiting disease'.

People of all ages are susceptible to norovirus and it is known to cause outbreaks in hospitals, schools, care homes and even on cruise ships, planes and in hotels.

Symptoms

When someone is infected by norovirus, the symptoms develop within 24 – 48 hours and usually begin with sickness (nausea and vomiting) followed by diarrhoea. Some people also experience a headache, aching bones and a slight fever.

Diagnosis

Vomiting and diarrhoea can be due to many different causes, especially in people having chemotherapy or radiotherapy. Doctors and nurses will often suspect norovirus infection in anyone who has vomiting and diarrhoea that develops within a few hours of another person having exactly the same symptoms. The only way to know for certain is for the laboratory to detect norovirus in stool (faeces) samples.

Treatment

There is no treatment for norovirus and the vomiting and/or diarrhoea usually only lasts for two or three days. Fortunately, most people generally recover with no lasting effects and severe illness is rare. It is important to try to prevent and treat any complications of diarrhoea and vomiting especially in babies, the elderly and people with compromised immunity.

Complications can be:

- **Dehydration** - so it is important to make sure that a person with norovirus drinks plenty of water
- **Sore skin around the bottom** - so it is important for anyone with diarrhoea to try to keep their bottom clean, for example, by using wet wipes after diarrhoea, using barrier creams and changing clothing daily or as soon as it becomes soiled. If you are a patient, it is important to tell the doctors or nurses if you notice that your skin is becoming sore or you are unable to drink enough water



Infection prevention and control measures

Unfortunately, gastroenteritis can enter the hospital with visitors, patients or staff who have diarrhoea or vomiting. Once inside the hospital, the infection can spread very quickly either by person to person or from contamination in the environment or on food. It is important to try to stop the infection from affecting the whole hospital.

The Infection Prevention and Control team monitors patients in hospital and advises ward staff if there appear to be any problems. Anyone developing diarrhoea will be more closely monitored.

It is important to try to remove germs from the environment. In addition to routine daily cleaning schedules, domestic staff will undertake supplementary cleaning and disinfection of a closed ward every day. Once patients have had no more diarrhoea and vomiting for approximately 48 hours, the ward will be thoroughly disinfected again and all linen and curtains will be changed before reopening the ward to new patients.

Hospital staff will follow these simple steps to help to minimise the risk of spread:

- Changing bed linen daily, sooner if it becomes soiled
- Cleaning the environment and equipment with a special type of disinfectant
- People with diarrhoea will be cared for separately to other patients

- Hospital staff will also use gloves and aprons when providing close personal care for patients

Visitors do not need to wear gloves and aprons but they must follow all advice on hand hygiene.

The hospital may decide to 'close' an affected ward to try to prevent the spread of infection. This just means that patients cannot be moved to other wards or hospitals until all the patients on the ward have recovered. This will not prevent patients from going home as soon as they are ready.

Food

Food left exposed in the environment or stored incorrectly can spoil or become contaminated and may then serve as a source of infection. We do not recommend that visitors eat on the wards during their visit or bring in any food to the hospital (other than biscuits, fruit or chocolates, which must be kept covered).

If visitors would like to bring in any other food for the patient, please discuss this with the nursing staff.

Information for visitors

Patients on 'closed' wards are still allowed visitors, but please think carefully before visiting and try to follow these few guidelines:

- Limit the number of visitors around the bed to two people



- We would advise that vulnerable people should not visit any area closed due to viral gastroenteritis, this includes children and people with any other illnesses
- Never come to visit someone in hospital if you are unwell with an infection, especially if you have diarrhoea and vomiting
- Please do not sit on the patient's bed

Hand hygiene

Hand hygiene is important for patients and visitors as well as for hospital staff. Hand washing using soap and water is most effective in this type of situation, but the hand hygiene rub that we use at The Clatterbridge Cancer Centre is also effective against norovirus.

Hand hygiene should be undertaken, especially after using the toilet; after helping someone else to use the toilet; before serving food; before eating, and after cleaning the environment.

Many of our wall mounted hand rub and soap dispensers are automatic and there is no need to touch them. Simply place your cupped hands underneath the dispenser and the correct amount will be dispensed onto your hands. For manual pump dispensers, just dispense one measured amount and use to cleanse your hands.

Procedures for hand cleansing

To ensure your hands are thoroughly clean, please wash them on the ward using liquid soap and water in the following manner:

1. Wet hands under running water
2. Dispense one dose of soap into a cupped hand
3. Hand wash for 15-30 seconds, vigorously and thoroughly, without adding more water
4. Rinse hands thoroughly under running water
5. Dry hands with paper towel

Frequently asked questions

Can norovirus come back?

Sometimes, the diarrhoea can come back again because immunity to norovirus does not last for more than a few weeks.

How will I know when the norovirus is gone?

When the diarrhoea stops and your normal bowel habits return, we consider the infection has gone. There is no need to send a further specimen to check.

Can I go home with norovirus?

You would normally wait until the diarrhoea has settled and your medical team is satisfied that you are fit for discharge. We would not like patients to be transferred to other hospitals or nursing homes without special preparations.



Who can I speak to if I have further questions?

Please speak to any of the ward staff caring for you.

The Infection Prevention and Control Team will listen confidentially to any comments and complaints so that we can learn from any mistakes and improve still further. You may write to us at the hospital or, if you would like to speak to an infection prevention and control nurse, you can contact us directly or your ward nurse can arrange a meeting.

Infection Prevention and Control Nurses
The Clatterbridge Cancer Centre NHS Foundation Trust
Clatterbridge Road
Bebington,
Wirral
CH63 4JY
Telephone 0151 556 5726

Other sources of information

Ward staff will be able to provide you with leaflets regarding specific infections and generic infection prevention and control.

Official Websites

Public Health England display information about many different infections. You can access this information using the A-Z function on their website at: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/public-health-england.

How we produce our information

All of our leaflets are produced by staff at The Clatterbridge Cancer Centre and this information is not sponsored or influenced in any way. Every effort is made to ensure that the information included in this leaflet is accurate and complete and we hope that it will add to any professional advice you have had. All our leaflets are evidence based where appropriate and they are regularly reviewed and updated. If you are concerned about your health in any way, you should consult your healthcare team.

We rely on a number of sources to gather evidence for our information. All of our information is in line with accepted national or international guidelines where possible. Where no guidelines exist, we rely on other reliable sources such as systematic reviews, published clinical trials data or a consensus review of experts. We also use medical textbooks, journals and government publications.

References for this leaflet can be obtained by telephoning 0151 556 5570.

If you need this leaflet in large print, Braille, audio or different language, please call 0151 556 5570.

If you have a comment, concern, compliment or complaint, please call 0151 556 5203.

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