Norovirus Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

What are noroviruses?

Noroviruses are a group of viruses that cause acute gastroenteritis (or the “stomach flu”) in people. These viruses are not related to the influenza virus.

How do people get infected with noroviruses?

Noroviruses are found in human feces and vomit. People can become infected with noroviruses by eating food or drinking liquids that have been contaminated with noroviruses, touching surfaces or objects that have been contaminated with noroviruses then putting their hand in their mouth, or having direct contact with someone who is ill with norovirus.

What are the symptoms of norovirus infection, how long after exposure do they appear, and how long do they last?

The symptoms of norovirus illness usually began 12 hours to 2 days after ingestion of the virus and include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and headache. Severe disease such as high fever and bloody diarrhea are uncommon but dehydration can be seen among the very young, the elderly and persons with weakened immune systems. Most people recover within 1–2 days but may continue to be contagious for as long as 2 weeks after recovery.

How long are people contagious?

People infected with norovirus are contagious from the moment they begin feeling ill to at least 3 days after recovery. Some people may be contagious for as long as 2 weeks after recovery. Therefore, it is particularly important for people to use good handwashing and other hygienic practices after they have recently recovered from norovirus illness.

What is the treatment for norovirus infection?

Currently there is no vaccine to prevent infection or medication that works against noroviruses. Antibiotics are not effective in treating norovirus. Norovirus infections are usually brief (about 1-2 days) in otherwise healthy people, but ill people can have severe diarrhea and vomiting. Ill people should drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration.

What are the most common patterns of norovirus infection?

Outbreaks of norovirus infections are very common because it is extremely contagious and easily spread from person-to-person. Both stool and vomit are infectious. Outbreaks can occur in schools, daycares, and nursing homes as well as restaurants, catered events, and cruise ships. Undercooked oysters harvested from contaminated water can also be a vehicle for norovirus infection.

How can norovirus infections be prevented?

Frequently wash hands with warm water and soap, especially after toilet visits, changing diapers, before eating, or preparing food.

Promptly disinfect contaminated surfaces with household chlorine bleach-based cleaners.

Immediately wash clothing and linens soiled with stool or vomit in hot water and soap.

Completely cook oysters to kill the virus.

Ill persons should not prepare food for at least 3 days after they recover.

Please, follow these links for additional information.

http://www.doh.wa.gov

http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/revb/gastro/norovirus-keyfacts.htm

http://www.cdc.gov/Features/Norovirus

http://www.cdc.gov/handwashing