

To Report an Outbreak or Consult with a Public Health Nurse call 360-778-6100 or leave a message on our Report Line at 360-778-6150



Whatcom County  
**HEALTH**  
Department



## QUICK GUIDE FOR LONG TERM CARE FACILITIES—NOROVIRUS OUTBREAKS

DIAGNOSIS	AT A GLANCE	
<p><b>Common symptoms</b> of norovirus include: diarrhea, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain low grade fever, headache, and muscle aches.</p> <p>In the absence of clinical laboratory diagnostics or in the case of delay in obtaining laboratory results, use Kaplan’s clinical and epidemiologic criteria to identify a norovirus gastroenteritis outbreak.</p> <p><b>Kaplan’s Criteria</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Vomiting in more than half of symptomatic cases <b>and</b>,</li> <li>2. Mean (or median) incubation period of 24 to 48 hours <b>and</b>,</li> <li>3. Mean (or median) duration of illness of 12 to 60 hours <b>and</b>,</li> <li>4. No bacterial pathogen isolated in stool culture</li> </ol> <p>Not all of norovirus outbreaks meet these criteria, if the criteria are not met, it does not mean the outbreak was not caused by norovirus. Testing should be done to determine the cause of illness.</p> <p><b>Immunity:</b> Short term after infection, no vaccination available</p>	<b>Incubation period:</b>	12-48 hours (avg. 33 hours)
	<b>Period of communicability:</b>	Varies but in general from onset of symptoms until 72 hours after symptom resolution (communicability can be prolonged in immunocompromised individuals)
	<b>Report to Public Health</b>	Within 1 day of one lab-confirmed case of norovirus or ≥ 2 cases of norovirus like illness
	<b>Treatment:</b>	Supportive, watch for signs and symptoms of dehydration and treat dehydration appropriately
	<b>Lab testing:</b>	RT-PCR from stool.  *negative test does not rule out norovirus.  Use Kaplan’s Criteria in the absence/delay of clinical laboratory diagnostics.
	<b>Further information including CDC &amp; DOH guidelines</b>	<a href="#">General Information about Norovirus   HAI   CDC</a> <a href="#">Norovirus Outbreak Toolkit :: Washington State Department of Health</a>

### NOROVIRUS FACTS

- The virus is found in the stool and vomit of infected people.
- When someone with norovirus vomits, the virus is distributed in small droplets in the air and can travel several feet through the air. The same is true when someone with diarrhea flushes a toilet.
- Norovirus can survive for weeks on hard surfaces.
- People with norovirus illness shed billions of viral particles in their stool and vomit. It only takes a small amount (fewer than 100) particles to make you sick.
- Norovirus can remain infectious on foods even at freezing temperatures and until heated *above* 140°F.
- Keeping norovirus out of the kitchen is essential. Infected food workers are frequently the source of outbreaks.

### KEY POINTS FOR PREVENTION OF ADDITIONAL CASES DURING A NOROVIRUS OUTBREAK

1. Rapid identification and isolation of suspected cases. Ill residents should be placed on contact isolation.
2. Increased adherence to hand hygiene
3. Designate staff to care for ill residents and minimize staff movement between areas in the facility with illness and areas not affected by the outbreak.
4. Enhanced environmental cleaning and disinfection using EPA approved disinfectants for norovirus.
5. Cancel group activities and consider serving all meals to residents in their rooms if the outbreak is widespread.
6. Only essential kitchen staff should be allowed in the kitchen area.
7. Exclude ill staff until their symptoms have been resolved for at least 48 hours.
8. Place signs around facility indicating that an outbreak is occurring. Limit visitation and exclude anyone with Noro-like illness from visiting the facility.
9. As long as appropriate infection control measures are maintained, facilities can admit new residents. It is important to inform potential new residents of the outbreak so they may choose whether to postpone their admission.

Note: A norovirus outbreak can generally be considered over 4 days from the last onset (the clock starts again with each new onset).