



## HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES DEPARTMENT

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### PUBLIC HEALTH –ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

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Immediate Release

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Key messages – norovirus is always present in the community at some level, and the most common cause of gastrointestinal disease.

Preventive measures – wash hands thoroughly after bathroom use,

Don't go to work or school, or prepare food when sick.

Ongoing outbreaks at nursing homes and a school in Vancouver, Washington, have kept norovirus in the news. These reports have increased public concern about the disease, but some basic facts that have not been well publicized.

Norovirus has always been a common cause of disease outbreaks, but only since an effective lab test was developed in 1998 has its full impact been known. Since 2001 over half of all disease outbreaks investigated in Oregon were caused by norovirus. Most outbreaks happen where large groups of people spend time together, such as schools, care facilities or worksites. However, most cases happen when an ill person transmits the virus to people they live with.

Vomiting and/or diarrhea are the primary symptoms of a norovirus infection, and are often accompanied by stomach cramps and a mild fever. The disease is as contagious as colds or the flu, but is spread differently. Norovirus is present in the vomit and diarrhea of infected people, and is spread when people consume contaminated food or water, or eat food after their hands become contaminated. Illness symptoms usually strike suddenly about 30-36 hours after being infected. Symptoms generally last from 12 to 48 hours.

The best way people can avoid becoming ill with this disease, and many other common diseases, is to wash their hands before eating and drinking, after using the bathroom, or after cleaning vomit or changing a diaper.

If you are sick with vomiting or diarrhea, stay home! Do not go to work or school until at least two days after your symptoms end. If you are taking care of someone that is sick, wash your hands very well throughout the day. Parents and caregivers should frequently and thoroughly wash their hands after changing a diaper or cleaning vomit. Always wash your hands after going to the bathroom and before preparing or serving food or drink to anyone.

For more information on norovirus or other communicable diseases, check out the Public Health website at: [www.co.yamhill.or.us/PH](http://www.co.yamhill.or.us/PH) or call 503-434-7525.