



# Yamhill County Fact Sheet

## *News you can use*

### **Norovirus & healthcare professionals**

#### **What is norovirus?**

Noroviruses are a group of highly contagious viruses that cause vomiting and diarrhea, in humans. Recovery is usually complete with no serious long-term health effects. Over half of all disease outbreaks investigated in Oregon are caused by norovirus.

#### **What are the symptoms of illness caused by norovirus?**

Symptoms usually begin 30-36 hours after exposure to norovirus but can occur earlier.

- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Abdominal cramps
- Possibly headache, low grade fever, chills, or muscle aches

These symptoms occur in all age groups although diarrhea is more common among adults and vomiting is more common in children.

**State law prohibits working in food preparation or care facilities while symptomatic, and recommends waiting at least 24 hours after symptoms are completely gone.**

#### **How is norovirus spread?**

People can become contagious before they start to feel ill, and can remain infectious for days after symptoms resolve. Vomit and diarrhea of ill individuals is extremely infectious, it takes only a few particles to become infected.

Norovirus must be swallowed to cause infection. Once it is swallowed it is then passed on in the stool and vomit of infected people. People can become infected by:

- Eating or drinking food or liquids that are contaminated by the feces or vomit of an infected person.
- Touching a contaminated surface, and then touching their mouth before hand washing.
- Having direct contact with an infected person, and then touching their mouth before hand washing.

It is especially important for healthcare providers that if you are taking care of someone who is sick or a young child, to frequently wash your hands. Especially after cleaning up vomit or diarrhea, or after changing a diaper.

In some cases, an infected person will vomit, causing the norovirus particles to become aerosolized. These fine particles may enter a person's mouth where they are then swallowed and ingested. In other cases, particles on a surface may be touched by a person who then touches their mouth or a food item. The virus can survive on contaminated surfaces for up to 24 hours.

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**How is norovirus diagnosed and treated?**

A clinical diagnosis is made based on the combination and timing of symptoms (vomiting and diarrhea). Stool samples can be tested to confirm a diagnosis, although this often is not done.

No specific treatment is available; patients need supportive care to treat dehydration and electrolyte disturbance. People who have recovered develop short-term immunity and are protected from re-infection. One of the main symptoms of norovirus is diarrhea, use of anti-diarrhea medications is not appropriate for this infection and may actually delay recovery.

**How should it be cleaned up?**

The virus can survive on contaminated surfaces for up to 24 hours. This makes proper cleanup very important, and isolation of ill individuals a necessity. Splattering or aerosolizing of the particles may occur while cleaning. Be sure to wear a mask when cleaning areas substantially contaminated.

**How is it prevented?**

- Frequent and thorough hand washing, especially after going to the bathroom, as well as before and after patient care
- Keep ill employees home until 24 hours after symptoms are gone
- Practice proper food storage and preparation to avoid contamination
- Clean contaminated surfaces with an approved disinfectant solution such as 10:1 bleach solution or equivalent commercial product
- Prompt washing of soiled linens and clothing in hot water

**Who to contact?**

While norovirus is not a reportable disease and not routinely diagnosed, Public Health relies on astute clinicians and care facilities to report suspected outbreaks. If you suspect an unusual cluster of illness, contact Yamhill County Public Health's 24 hour disease reporting line at 503-474-3194.

Yamhill County Public Health  
412 NE Ford St. McMinnville  
Ph. 503-434-7525 or 554-7842  
[www.co.yamhill.or.us/ph](http://www.co.yamhill.or.us/ph)