

ALLEGAN COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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Office Administration

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Bioterrorism Preparedness

673-5411

Personal Health

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Communicable Disease

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Environmental Health

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Resource Recovery

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Norovirus

What are Noroviruses?

Noroviruses are a group of viruses that cause gastroenteritis in people. Norovirus is known *incorrectly* as the “stomach flu”; however it is not related to the flu (influenza).

What are the early symptoms?

Norovirus illness usually begins 24-48 hours after exposure, but can appear as early as 10 hours after exposure. Symptoms usually include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and stomach cramps. Sometimes people have muscle aches, headaches, chills, a sense of tiredness, and a low-grade fever. Symptoms are self-limiting; they go away after 1-2 days.

How is it spread?

Noroviruses are very contagious and spread easily from person to person. The virus is found in the stool and vomit of infected people. People can become infected in several ways, including eating food or drinking liquids that are contaminated by infected food handlers, touching surfaces or objects contaminated with norovirus and then touching their mouth before hand washing, or having direct contact with another person who is infected.

What about contacts?

Contacts should stay home. They should not share or prepare or serve food to others until 48 hours after symptoms end. They should drink fluids and stay in bed.

How long is the person contagious?

A person infected with norovirus is able to spread the disease from the moment symptoms begin to at least 3 days after recovery. Some people may be contagious for as long as 2 weeks after recovery; therefore, good hand washing is very important. Persons infected with norovirus should not prepare food while they have symptoms and for 3 days after they recover.

When is it OK to return to school/work/daycare?

Since the virus is passed in vomit and stool, children should not go to daycare or school while they have diarrhea or vomiting. Once illness ends, children can return to school or daycare, but hand washing must be strictly monitored. Persons who work in nursing homes, take care of patients, or handle food should stay out of work until at least 48-72 hours **after** symptoms end.

Other Important Information/Prevention

- Currently there is no medication or vaccine for norovirus. A virus causes this illness, so antibiotics don't work against it.
- Wash hands after using the bathroom or changing diapers and before eating or preparing food. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers do not work against norovirus. Wash hands with warm soapy water for 15-20 seconds. Scrub between fingers and under nails. Use paper towel to turn off faucet and open restroom door. More information can be found at www.cdc.gov/norovirus

This fact sheet is not intended to replace the advice of your physician. Parents should contact their healthcare provider if they have concerns regarding their child's health. If you have general questions, you may contact an Allegan County Public Health Nurse at 269-673-5411.