Norovirus

What college students need to know

Q. *What is norovirus (aka stomach flu)?*

A. Norovirus is a very contagious virus that causes stomach pain, nausea, diarrhea and vomiting for one to two days. Norovirus is usually not serious in healthy individuals, though people may feel very sick and vomit several times a day. Norovirus can lead to serious complications in young children, the elderly, and people with other health conditions.

Q. *What are the symptoms?*

A. Symptoms usually include diarrhea, vomiting, nausea, and stomach cramping. Other less common symptoms may include low-grade fever, chills, headache, muscle aches, and a general sense of fatigue. Norovirus usually begins one to two days after exposure, but can appear as early as 10 hours after becoming infected. The illness is usually brief, with symptoms lasting only one to two days.

Q. *How does it spread?*

A. Norovirus is found in the stool and vomit of infected people and is easily spread from one person to another, especially in close quarters such as dorms. It can be transmitted by:

- Touching surfaces or objects contaminated with norovirus (think bathrooms, keyboards, etc.)
- Consuming contaminated food or drinks
- Having direct contact with someone who is infected (such as a roommate who is sick with the virus)

Q. *How long are people contagious?*

A. People infected with norovirus are contagious from the moment they begin feeling ill to at least three days after recovery. Some people may be contagious for as long as two weeks after recovery. Therefore, good hand washing is important. Persons with symptoms of norovirus should not prepare food for others while they are ill and for three days after they recover.

Q. *Is there treatment for norovirus?*

A. Norovirus simply needs to run its course. There is no antiviral medication that works, no vaccine to prevent it, and norovirus cannot be treated with antibiotics because antibiotics work to fight bacteria, not viruses.

If you experience vomiting and diarrhea, you should stay home from work and from class until your symptoms have passed, and drink plenty of liquids (sports drinks, water, and oral rehydration fluids) to reduce your chance of becoming dehydrated.

Q. *How can I prevent getting norovirus?*

A. The single best way to reduce your chances of getting norovirus is by practicing proper hand hygiene.

### Practicing proper hand hygiene

Wash your hands (and under your nails) with soap and water, especially after using the restroom and always before eating, preparing, or handling food.

- Alcohol-based hand sanitizers are not usually effective against norovirus. It doesn’t hurt to use them, but know that you won’t be as protected.
- Avoid touching your hands to your eyes, nose, or mouth.
Norovirus (continued)

Q. What should I do if I get sick?

A. There is very little you can do to ease the symptoms of norovirus, but you should start feeling better in one to two days. Until then you should:

- **STAY HOME.** UHS expects that you stay home from class and work for at least three days after your last symptoms.
- **STAY HYDRATED.** It’s important to consume at least two to three liters of liquid per day to reduce your chance of becoming dehydrated.
  1. If vomiting occurs, wait one to two hours after vomiting and try a few sips of water or ice chips.
  2. As tolerated, drink frequent, small amounts of oral rehydration fluids (think Pedialyte), sports drinks, or water.
- **LIMIT CONTACT.** If you have sudden vomiting and/or diarrhea, you should limit contact with others while you have symptoms and for three days after. Alert your roommates that you are sick so they may be especially vigilant with their own precautions.
- **WASH YOUR HANDS.** Continue thorough hand-washing practices.
- **EAT WHEN YOU’RE READY.** As soon as you feel up to it, try easy-to-digest foods such as soup, soda crackers, bread, or bananas. Avoid alcohol and caffeine, spicy and fatty foods, and milk products until your stomach is settled.
- **STAY OUT OF THE KITCHEN.** You must not prepare or handle food for others. Avoid washing your dishes in a common bathroom sink. If you work in food service (including handling, preparation, cooking, or serving), health care, or child care, you should notify your employer of your symptoms, and you must stay home from work until three days after your symptoms have resolved.

If you live in a residence hall, you should report your symptoms to a Residence Life staff member.

Q. Do I need to seek medical care?

A. If you experience symptoms lasting more than two days, have signs of dehydration (dry mouth, small amount of dark urine, and lightheadedness/dizziness), or have other concerns or questions, call UHS at 608-265-5600.

What to do if you become ill with norovirus

- **STAY HOME**
- **STAY HYDRATED**
- **LIMIT CONTACT**
- **WASH HANDS**
- **EAT WHEN READY**
- **STAY OUT OF KITCHEN**

Q. I’m starting to feel better. What now?

A. Even though you may be feeling better, you are still very contagious for the next three days. Continue to limit contact, practice good hand hygiene, and stay out of the kitchen. If you haven’t already, start disinfecting your room/home.

- **BLEACH IT.** Toilets, sinks, and other surfaces that become contaminated with vomit or stool should be cleaned with a diluted (10 percent) bleach solution.
- **WASH IT.** Immediately remove and wash clothes or linens that may be contaminated with vomit or stool. Use the hottest setting and bleach whenever possible.