

# Norovirus

## What is norovirus?

Noroviruses are a group of viruses that can cause gastroenteritis, an inflammation of the stomach and intestines. Norovirus is the leading cause of foodborne illness outbreaks in Minnesota. This infection is often mistakenly referred to as the “stomach flu”. Norovirus is not related to the flu (influenza), which is a common respiratory illness caused by the influenza virus.

## What are the symptoms?

Common symptoms of norovirus infection include vomiting, diarrhea, and stomach cramping. Less common symptoms can include low-grade fever or chills, headache, and muscle aches. Symptoms usually begin 1 or 2 days after ingesting the virus but may appear as early as 12 hours after exposure.

## How long does it last?

Most people recover in 1 to 3 days and have no long-term health effects. Dehydration can be a concern in the very young, the elderly, or people with weakened immune systems. People can shed norovirus in their stool for a few weeks after their symptoms stop.

**To report a suspected foodborne illness, call the Minnesota Department of Health Foodborne Illness Hotline at 1-877-FOOD-ILL (or 651-201-5655 from the Twin Cities).**

Minnesota Department of Health  
PO Box 64975  
St. Paul, MN 55164-0975  
651-201-5414  
[health.foodill@state.mn.us](mailto:health.foodill@state.mn.us)  
<https://www.health.state.mn.us>

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To obtain this information in a different format, call:  
651- 201-5414.

## How is it spread?

Noroviruses are very contagious. They are found in the stool (feces) or vomit of infected people. When infected people do not wash their hands well after using the bathroom, noroviruses can spread to food, water, or surfaces that they touch.

People become infected with norovirus by:

- Eating food or drinking liquids contaminated by an infected person
- Eating uncooked shellfish that has been harvested from contaminated waters
- Touching contaminated surfaces or objects and then touching their mouth
- Eating without washing their hands first

## What should I do if I have symptoms?

- Drink plenty of fluids.
- Wash your hands often (most hand sanitizers do not kill norovirus!).
- Avoid preparing food for others while sick and for at least 3 days after you recover.
- Contact your health care provider if you have concerns or questions.

## How can I prevent norovirus infections?

- Wash your hands with warm, soapy water for 20 seconds:
  - After using the bathroom
  - After changing diapers
  - Before preparing foods
  - Before eating
- Clean and disinfect surfaces with a household bleach solution immediately after vomiting or diarrheal accidents.
- Do not eat food prepared by someone who is sick with vomiting or diarrhea.
- Cook oysters and other shellfish to at least 145°F before eating them.