Norovirus
A disease that requires contact enteric precautions

What is norovirus?

Norovirus is the name of a group of viruses that are a common cause of viral gastroenteritis (“stomach flu”). It is sometimes called a “Norwalk-like virus.”

The disease usually affects groups of people, mostly adults or older children. Some outbreaks have been linked to banquets, cruise ships, nursing homes, health care facilities, cafeterias, recreational lakes, swimming pools, campgrounds, hotels, schools, and fast food restaurants.

People with a norovirus infection may feel very sick for several days. The disease is rarely serious, but if someone with norovirus loses a lot of fluids, they may need a hospital stay.

How is norovirus spread?

The norovirus organism is found in stool (feces) and vomit. People can become infected by eating or drinking contaminated foods or touching items or surfaces that are soiled with stool or vomit and then touching their mouth or mucus membranes.

Anyone can spread the virus to others or themselves through their hands if they do not wash their hands.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms begin within 12 to 48 hours after being exposed to the virus. They usually last 12 to 60 hours. Symptoms can include:

- Nausea and vomiting
- Watery diarrhea
- Stomach cramps
- Fever, chills, headache, and muscle aches

This handout describes norovirus, who is at risk for getting the disease, how it can be spread, and how to keep others from getting it.

To learn more about norovirus, visit these Web sites:

www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/revb/gastro/norovirus.htm
www.kingcounty.gov/healthservices/health/communicable/diseases/norovirus.aspx
How are others protected from norovirus in the home?

Follow these safety precautions to reduce the spread of norovirus to others:

- Wash your hands with soap and water, especially after using the restroom, after changing diapers, before preparing food, and before eating.
- Flush vomit and stool down the toilet.
- Clean contaminated countertops, toilets, and floors right away with soap and water and then disinfect them with a solution of ½ cup bleach mixed with 1 gallon of water. Leave on the surface for 10 minutes and then rinse with water and air dry. Steam cleaning can disinfect carpets.
- Wash contaminated clothing and linens right away with hot water and soap.
- Do not prepare food or have contact with healthy people for at least 3 days after your last symptoms occurred.
- Wash raw fruits and vegetables.
- Do **not** eat raw oysters.

How are others protected from norovirus at the medical center?

At University of Washington Medical Center, we place a “Contact Enteric Precautions” sign near the door of rooms of patients who have norovirus. This alerts health care workers and visitors to use precautions when caring for the patient or when touching items in the room.

What happens when I am in contact precautions?

Enteric precautions are taken to prevent infections that spread through stool and vomit. Health care workers wear gowns and gloves when caring for you. Hand washing and keeping the environment clean are stressed.

You will be asked to stay in your room unless you need to go to other departments in the hospital for treatment. This is called being “in precautions.” If you go to other departments for tests or treatments, we will ask you to wash your hands and to wear a gown and gloves on the way there.

Please do not use the nutrition rooms while you are in precautions. When you want a snack or water, ask a member of your health care team to bring it to you.

When can the contact precautions be stopped?

Precautions can usually be stopped 3 days after the last symptoms have occurred.