



Patient Information

Viral Gastroenteritis (diarrhoea and vomiting including Norovirus)

What is viral gastroenteritis?

It is an illness also known as “gastric flu, tummy bug, winter vomiting virus, Norwalk or Norovirus”. It is most common during the winter months, however it can occur at any time of the year.

How does it spread?

The virus is easily transmitted from one person to another.

It can be easily introduced into hospitals, care homes, schools and nurseries by infectious patients, visitors or staff.

It can also be passed onto others via:

- Close contact with someone who is ill or recovering from the illness
- Contact with contaminated environment
- Eating contaminated food

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms usually begin 12-48 hours after becoming infected. The illness is self-limiting and will usually last for 12-72 hours. It usually starts with a sudden onset of nausea, followed by projectile vomit and/or watery explosive diarrhoea. Some people may experience a raised temperature, headaches and aching limbs.

How can the spread of illness be prevented?

If there are several patients on the same ward who develop symptoms over a short period of time, an outbreak will be suspected and the **ward may be closed to admissions** to prevent any new patients having contact with the illness and becoming infected.

During this time, it may be necessary for any non-urgent transfers to other wards, hospitals and nursing/residential homes to be postponed to prevent the risk of the infection spreading to other areas.



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The ward will also undergo a special clean (with chlorine) before it is reopened. This may involve you moving rooms within the ward during this process. Keep isolation room and bay doors closed to minimise air movement.

Hand washing

Hand washing is essential in the prevention of the spread of infection.

- Washing your hands with soap and water after using the toilet, before eating and after handling any potentially contaminated items such as laundry, remembering to dry them thoroughly can help prevent any spread
- On entering and leaving the ward you should decontaminate your hands with the alcohol gel provided

How could the illness affect you as a patient?

If you become unwell with symptoms whilst on the ward, you may be moved into a single room. Alternatively, you may be nursed with other patients with the same illness.

- Whilst on a closed ward, visiting is discouraged, especially by the elderly and very young, as these groups may be more at risk of catching viral gastroenteritis
- If you are a patient who requires a procedure elsewhere in the hospital, it will not be delayed due to the outbreak and infection control precautions will be taken. Non urgent procedures shall be delayed until after the outbreak
- If you are a patient unaffected by symptoms on a closed ward, we discourage movement around the ward and hospital for your own and others protection against infection

Discharge from hospital

- Patients may be discharged to their own homes if well enough
- Please inform staff of your involvement in the outbreak if you are readmitted to another ward/hospital within three days of discharge

Visiting

- Visitors who themselves have symptoms (for example, nausea, diarrhoea, vomiting) should refrain from visiting any ward until 72 hours after their symptoms have stopped
- Under exceptional circumstances where visitors are permitted onto a closed ward they should remain with the person they are visiting, as socialising with other patients may pass on infection and, **hands must be washed** and the alcohol rub used before leaving the ward. Please ask staff for assistance, if required



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Laundry

- Clothes can become easily soiled during this time, so we advise that ward nightwear is used by patients until the symptoms stop
- If patients' own clothing does become soiled it will be placed in a plastic bag in the locker to be taken by relatives and laundered. Wash these clothes separately on the hottest wash suitable for the garment
- Don't forget to wash your hands after handling soiled linen

Food and Drink

- Diarrhoea and vomiting can result in dehydration. It is important to drink plenty of fluid in order to prevent this
- Any food kept on the ward, for example, fruit, should be put into a locker and washed and peeled before eating
- Visitors are advised not to eat or drink during visiting at this time

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Further information can be found at:

- GOV UK – www.gov.uk
- The NHS website www.nhs.uk
- Please speak to the ward staff or ask them to contact the Infection Control Team.

From 1st January 2019 smoking will not be permitted on any NHS site in England. Smoking will not be permitted within any of our buildings or anywhere outside on our sites. Smoking facilities will not be provided. Please be considerate of others when vaping in hospital grounds.

This information sheet is available to order in other languages and formats. If you would like a copy, please contact us on 01793 604031 or email gwh.pals@nhs.net

Document Control

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