

## Nevada State Health Division – Office of Epidemiology

### Recommendations for Preventing and Controlling Viral (Norovirus) Gastroenteritis Outbreaks in the Workplace

Noroviruses are a group of viruses that cause gastroenteritis in people. Gastroenteritis is an inflammation of the lining of the stomach and intestines. The term “norovirus” is the official name for this group of viruses.

**Symptoms:** The symptoms of norovirus illness usually include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and some stomach cramping. Sometimes people also have a low-grade fever, chills, headache, muscle aches, and a general sense of tiredness. The illness often begins suddenly, and the infected person may feel very sick. In most people the illness is self-limiting, with symptoms lasting for about 1 or 2 days.

Many people feel very sick and vomit many times a day, but most people get better within 1 or 2 days. However, sometimes people are unable to drink enough liquids to replace the liquids lost because of vomiting and diarrhea. These persons can become dehydrated (lose too much water from their body) and may need special medical attention.

Symptoms of norovirus illness usually begin about 12 to 72 hours after ingestion of the virus, but they can appear as early as 12 hours after exposure.

**How do people become infected with noroviruses?** Noroviruses are found in the stool and vomit of infected people. People can become infected with the virus in several ways:

- by eating food or drinking liquids that are contaminated with norovirus,
- by touching surfaces or objects contaminated with norovirus, and then placing their hand in their mouth, and
- by having direct contact with another person who is infected (for example, when caring for someone with illness, or sharing foods or eating utensils with someone who is ill).

**How contagious is Norovirus?** Noroviruses are very contagious and can spread easily from person to person. Both stool and vomit are infectious. People with norovirus are contagious from the moment they begin feeling ill to at least 3 days (72 hours) **after** symptoms

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disappear. Therefore, it is particularly important for people to use good hand washing and other hygienic practices after they have recently recovered from norovirus illness. Anyone can become infected with noroviruses. There are many different strains of norovirus, which makes it difficult for a person's body to develop long-lasting immunity. Therefore, norovirus illness can recur throughout a person's lifetime.

**Treatment of norovirus:** There is no vaccine to prevent norovirus infection. There is no drug to treat people who are infected with the virus. Antibiotic drugs will not help if you have norovirus infection. This is because they fight against bacteria not viruses.

Norovirus illness is usually brief in people who are otherwise healthy. But, the infection can cause severe vomiting and diarrhea, which can lead to dehydration.

**Prevention of norovirus infection:** You can decrease your chance of coming in contact with noroviruses by following these prevention steps:

- Frequently wash your hands, especially after toilet visits and changing diapers and before eating and preparing food.
- Carefully wash fruits and vegetables, and steam oysters before eating them.
- Thoroughly clean and disinfect contaminated surfaces immediately after an episode of illness by using a bleach-based household cleaner.
- Immediately remove and wash clothing or linens that may be contaminated with virus after an episode of illness (use hot water and soap).
- Flush or discard any vomitus and/or stool in the toilet and make sure that the surrounding area is kept clean.

Persons who are infected with norovirus should not prepare food while they have symptoms and for at least 2-3 days after they recover from their illness. Food that may have been contaminated by an ill person should be disposed of properly.

For more information on norovirus, please visit the Nevada State Health Division Office of Epidemiology website at: <http://health.nv.gov/Epidemiology.htm>