

11. NOROVIRUS (WINTER VOMITING DISEASE)

Date:

Dear Parent or Guardian,

There have been cases of norovirus (winter vomiting disease) within your child's school and your child may have been exposed.

What is winter vomiting disease?

A virus known as norovirus causes winter vomiting disease. The virus usually causes short-lasting outbreaks but is very contagious. The infection has caused many outbreaks in the community and in health care settings in recent years.

What are the symptoms of winter vomiting disease?

Symptoms can include:

- Nausea (often sudden onset)
- Vomiting (often projectile)
- Crampy abdominal pain
- Watery diarrhoea
- High temperature chills and muscle aches.

Symptoms begin around 12 to 48 hours after becoming infected. The illness is usually brief, with symptoms lasting only about 1-2 days. However, illness may be prolonged in some people (usually the very young or elderly). In more severe cases it may cause dehydration and require hospital treatment.

If you have any specific concerns about your child you should contact your GP.

How is winter vomiting disease spread?

People can become infected with the virus in several ways, including:

- Contact with an infected person, especially contact with vomit or faeces.
- Contact with contaminated surfaces or objects and then touching eyes, nose or mouth.
- Consuming contaminated food or water.

What can be done to prevent infection?

It is often impossible to prevent infection; however, taking good hygiene measures around someone who is infected can decrease your chance of getting infected.

- Wash hands frequently including before eating or preparing food and after toilet use.
- Thoroughly clean and disinfect contaminated surfaces immediately after an episode of vomiting or diarrhoea by using a bleach-based household cleaner.
- Flush or discard any vomit and/or faeces in the toilet and make sure that the surrounding area is kept clean.

Are noroviruses contagious?

Noroviruses are very contagious and can spread easily from person to person. Both faeces and vomit of an infected person contain the virus and are infectious. People infected with norovirus are contagious from the moment they begin feeling ill to two to three days after recovery. Some people may be contagious for as long as two weeks after recovery.

It is important for people to use good hand washing and other hygienic practices after they have recently recovered from a norovirus infection. In addition, noroviruses are very resilient and can survive in the environment (on surfaces etc.) for a number of weeks. Therefore it is important that surfaces and objects that may have become contaminated are cleaned thoroughly.

Can my child stay in school?

It is extremely important that people who have been ill with vomiting or diarrhoea **should remain off school or work while symptomatic and for two full days after their last episode of vomiting or diarrhoea.**

Thank you for giving this your attention. Your GP will be able to answer any further questions that you might have about winter vomiting disease.