

# CUYAHOGA COUNTY

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# BOARD OF HEALTH

YOUR TRUSTED SOURCE FOR PUBLIC HEALTH INFORMATION

## **NOROVIRUS – questions and answers**

### **What is Norovirus?**

Norovirus is the most common cause of gastrointestinal (GI) distress in America. It can spread quickly from person to person and is responsible for 58% of all foodborne illnesses. More than 20 million people are affected each year. The annual cost to our economy is \$2 billion in healthcare expenses and lost productivity. Handwashing is one of the best defenses against catching and spreading Norovirus.

### **What are the symptoms?**

Symptoms include uncontrolled diarrhea and/or vomiting, dehydration and weakness. Dehydration is very dangerous for the young, elderly and immunocompromised populations. On average, there are 60,000 hospitalizations and up to 800 deaths per year.

### **How long does it take for symptoms to appear?**

12 to 48 hours after being exposed. Illness normally lasts one to three days.

### **How long can the virus survive?**

For as long as seven weeks, Norovirus can remain alive on objects that are not properly cleaned and/or sanitized. It is stronger than some disinfectants, so be sure to get a product that specifically kills Norovirus.

### **How does it spread?**

Norovirus is found in the feces and vomit of an infected person. It can become airborne and contaminate things nearby. It can also spread when unwashed hands touch surfaces or other people. Other ways include:

- Infected people come into direct contact with others – touching, kissing, hugging, hand shake  
Infected people prepare food or drink, touch fixtures, or use a common bathroom
- Sharing food or liquids that are contaminated
- Using the same cups, plates or utensils
- Touching contaminated objects and sticking your fingers in your mouth before washing your hands

## **WAYS TO PREVENT THE SPREAD**

### ***Wash your hands properly and often***

After using the toilet or changing diapers  
Before handling, preparing or eating food

### ***Do not prepare food for others when you are sick***

From the time you feel ill to three days later (when you recover), do not make food for anyone  
Very important in schools, child care, elder care – places where an outbreak could occur

### ***Wash all fruits and vegetables***

Produce is grown in the ground or on trees where it can become contaminated

### ***Clean and disinfect contaminated surfaces***

Following diarrhea and/or vomiting, immediately clean and disinfect all affected surfaces

### ***Use one of these two methods***

Apply a disinfectant approved by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

Mix a chlorine bleach solution of 1000-5000 ppm, or 2.5 - 12.5 ounces (5 to 25 tablespoons) of household bleach (5.25%), per gallon of water

### ***Wash laundry carefully***

In the event of an accident:

Immediately remove all contaminated clothing, linens, rugs, etc.

Handle all materials gently – do not agitate, shake out or throw the items

Wear disposable gloves and a face mask at all times when handling dirty laundry

Throw away the gloves and mask and wash your hands right after handling

Wash clothes with detergent for the longest cycle available

Use a dryer at the highest heat allowable for the fabrics

### **When do cases or outbreaks occur?**

Illness can occur at any time, but outbreaks are most active from November through April.

### **Can I get sick with Norovirus more than once?**

Like covid, there are several different strains. You can get re-infected and become sick again. There is no vaccine to prevent Norovirus.

### **What should a childcare center do if a child or staff member become ill with Norovirus?**

Send ill people home right away for 48-72 hours. Clean and sanitize regularly. Remind everyone about the importance of handwashing.

### **What should a childcare center do in case of an outbreak?**

Please contact us at 216.201.2080 for immediate assistance.