

Infection prevention and control team

Norovirus

Information for patients, relatives and carers

Introduction

We take cleanliness and infection prevention and control very seriously. All staff receive regular training on infection prevention and control and should be able to answer any questions or concerns you may have.

Many hospital infections can be avoided. To control hospital infections effectively we need the support and cooperation of patients and visitors as well as staff.

What is norovirus?

Norovirus is often called winter vomiting disease (although it can strike at any time of year). It is a stomach bug that can pass from one person to another very quickly and easily.

- its symptoms include severe nausea, vomiting, stomach pains and/or diarrhoea.
- you may also have a high temperature, headache and **aching** arms and legs.
- symptoms start suddenly within 1 to 2 days of being infected.

Norovirus is **not** a hospital infection as it mostly affects people in the community. Outbreaks have been known to occur in workplaces, schools and in other situations where people are together in a confined space.

If it is brought into the hospital environment by an affected individual, it can spread very easily to vulnerable hospital patients and to staff. This in turn can make it difficult to maintain normal hospital services.

Special message to visitors

Please do not visit the hospital if you feel unwell or have nausea, vomiting or diarrhoea.

Even when you feel better, you may still be infectious and can pass the disease to other people – for that reason, please do not visit the hospital until **at least 48 hours** after you last experienced nausea, vomiting and/or diarrhoea.

Controlling norovirus outbreaks

Outbreaks can be contained and prevented from spreading further if people recognise the symptoms early and take action to ensure they don't pass the infection on.

If a lot of patients or staff are affected by norovirus, we may close the ward to new admissions (and possibly visitors) to prevent the disease from spreading further. We will keep you fully informed if this step needs to be taken.

How is norovirus spread?

- close contact with someone with norovirus
- touching surfaces or objects that have the virus in them, then touching your mouth
- eating food that has been prepared or handled by someone with norovirus

How you can help stop the spread of norovirus

- if you feel unwell, have a fever, feel sick, have vomited or had diarrhoea, and have stomach pains or aching muscles, please tell a member of staff straight away
- make sure you wash your hands with soap and warm water frequently, especially after being sick or going to the toilet
- drink plenty of clear fluids, such as water, squash, tonic water or lemonade and clear soups. Follow the guidance from hospital staff

Norovirus is most infectious from the start of symptoms until 48 hours after all symptoms have stopped. You may also be infectious for a short time before and after this.

You can get norovirus more than once because the virus is always changing, and your body is unable to build up long-term resistance to it.

Some planned investigations or operations may be delayed until you are feeling better. This is to avoid spread of the infection.

Norovirus cannot be treated with antibiotics. This is because antibiotics work to fight bacteria and not viruses.

What will the hospital staff do to minimise the spread of norovirus?

Staff are trained in how to manage suspected cases of norovirus and other diseases that can cause sudden, unexpected vomiting and/or diarrhoea. This includes:

- informing our infection prevention and control team
- isolating patients with symptoms in a single room or dedicated bay
- continuing to have good hand hygiene by washing their hands with soap and warm water, and drying them thoroughly
- wearing appropriate personal protective clothing (ppe), such as gloves and aprons, for contact with vomit or diarrhoea and then disposing of them immediately afterwards

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- collecting specimens of diarrhoea and sending them for testing as soon as possible
 - educating patients and visitors about norovirus symptoms and any precautions they need to take
 - ensuring increased levels of cleaning, particularly in bathrooms and toilets, where bleach solution is used to guarantee the highest level of hygiene

How do I make a comment about my visit?

We aim to provide the best possible service and staff will be happy to answer any of the questions you may have. If you have any **suggestions** or **comments** about your visit, please either speak to a member of staff or contact the patient advice and liaison service (**PALS**) on **020 3312 7777** (10.00 – 16.00, Monday to Friday). You can also email PALS at imperial.pals@nhs.net The PALS team will listen to your concerns, suggestions or queries and is often able to help solve problems on your behalf.

Alternatively, you may wish to complain by contacting our complaints department:

Complaints department, fourth floor, Salton House, St Mary's Hospital, Praed Street
London W2 1NY

Email: ICHC-tr.Complaints@nhs.net

Telephone: **020 3312 1337 / 1349**

Alternative formats

This leaflet can be provided on request in large print or easy read, as a sound recording, in Braille or in alternative languages. Please email the communications team:
imperial.communications@nhs.net

Wi-fi

Wi-fi is available at our Trust. For more information visit our website: www.imperial.nhs.uk

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