



## **INFECTION PREVENTION AND CONTROL**

### **Norovirus Infection Patient Information**

#### **What is *Norovirus*?**

Previously known as Norwalk-like virus, and sometimes mislabeled as the “stomach flu” (it is not caused by the Influenza virus), *Norovirus* is part of a group of viruses that can cause diarrhea and vomiting in persons of all ages. The illness occurs only in humans and is found all over the world. In North America, *Norovirus* infection is most common between October and April but can happen at any time. It is often called “gastroenteritis”.

#### **How do people get *Norovirus*?**

*Norovirus* is very contagious. The virus is present in bowel movements (stool) and vomit. It is usually spread by contaminated hands after direct contact with a sick person, or contact with contaminated surfaces, such as toilets, door handles, or light switches. Healthcare workers and people who handle food can spread this virus if they don’t clean their hands prior to caring for their patients or making meals.

#### **How does *Norovirus* make people sick?**

The virus causes swelling in your stomach and/or intestines. Serious illness is rare. It can be more serious for younger children, older adults, and those with medical conditions that are more likely to get dehydrated from the vomiting and diarrhea.

#### **What are the symptoms of an infection with *Norovirus*?**

Symptoms include stomach pain or cramping, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea (mild to severe). Fever is rare, and if present, is not very high. These symptoms develop 12-48 hours after being infected by the virus and continue for 2-3 days. The virus can still be passed to other people for two days after the diarrhea has stopped.

#### **Can infections with *Norovirus* be treated?**

Antibiotics are not effective against viruses, including *Norovirus*. The best treatment is to get plenty of rest, and drink water to replace fluids lost by vomiting and diarrhea.

## **What does the Hospital do to prevent the spread of the *Norovirus* germ?**

Hand washing is the most important way for everyone to prevent the spread of viruses. Be sure to clean your hands before eating and after using the toilet. Patient safety is very important in the hospital. Our goal is to always identify patients with *Norovirus* infections and institute infection control measures quickly. If you develop nausea, vomiting and/or diarrhea you may be moved to a private room and your Nurses and Doctors will care for you wearing gloves and a gown. During the time you are vomiting and/or have diarrhea, you will be asked to stay in your room; however, you may still have visitors. We will ask your visitors to clean their hands upon entering and exiting your room. Visitors and everyone entering your room to provide care will need to wear a gown and gloves.

## **What special precautions are needed for *Norovirus* at home?**

Generally speaking, people in the hospital are sicker and get more infections than people in the community. At home, precautions do not need to be as strict. However, certain steps can help reduce the risk of spreading this virus to family members and other visitors.

Wash your hands for at least 15 seconds after using the toilet, before eating or before preparing food. If you have *Norovirus*, do not prepare food for others until at least 48 hours has passed without diarrhea. Caregivers should wash their hands after providing care. Gloves should be used to handle body fluids or dirty items. Discard disposable gloves in the regular garbage or clean rubber gloves after use.

No special precautions are required to clean your home. This virus can be destroyed by most household cleaning products or diluted household bleach (1 part bleach to 10 parts water). Wet a clean cloth thoroughly and wipe surfaces starting from the cleanest area and moving towards the dirtiest area, paying special attention to areas such as the toilet and bathroom sink. Let the surfaces air dry to allow enough contact time with the cleaning product to kill the virus.

## **What do I need to know prior to discharge?**

Norovirus can remain in the stool for several days after an infection. It is important to maintain good hand washing and cleaning practices.

If you have questions about the information in this document, contact Queensway Carleton Hospital's Infection Prevention and Control at 613-721-2000, ext. 3777.