

## NOROVIRUS 101

We have been hearing a lot about Norovirus in the news lately. Several schools in the Chicagoland area have closed recently because of the unusually high number of cases having being reported in their school. While District 35 has seen several students with signs and symptoms of stomach flu, the amount of reported cases has not been alarming. Nevertheless, “**Norovirus 101**” would be beneficial for all to review to help prevent the spread of norovirus.

The Noroviruses are a group of viruses that can cause inflammation of the stomach and intestines (gastroenteritis). This leads to cramping, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea.

Norovirus (also called Norwalk virus) is the most common cause of gastroenteritis in the U.S. It is most prevalent in cooler months, especially from November to April. Individuals are able to get infected with norovirus more than once, as there are many different strains of the virus. For most individuals, norovirus is not serious, and they recuperate within 1-3 days. However, norovirus can become serious in young children, the elderly, and individuals with other health conditions. Norovirus can lead to severe dehydration, hospitalization and even death.

Norovirus is spread quickly directly from people and from surfaces infected with the virus. It can spread by: providing care to ill individuals, sharing contaminated foods/drinks, changing diapers, shaking hands, touching contaminated surfaces, and touching your mouth, It is common in nursing homes, daycare centers, schools, and, YES-cruise ships. Also, outbreaks are frequently reported in restaurants and catered-meal settings if contaminated food is served.

Norovirus symptoms usually occur 12 to 48 hours after first exposure to the virus, and last approximately one to three days. Individuals, who are ill with norovirus, are most contagious when they are exhibiting signs and symptoms until three days after they are symptom free. Norovirus symptoms include:

### **Common symptoms:**

- Cramping
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea

### **Less common symptoms:**

- Low-grade fever
- Chills headache
- Muscle aches
- Fatigue

**Here are 5 tips to protect yourself and others from norovirus:**

1. *Practice proper hand washing techniques.*  
Wash your hands frequently and diligently with soap and water, especially after using the toilet, changing diapers, caring for ill individuals, and before eating or preparing foods. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers with at least 60% alcohol, can be used in addition to handwashing.
2. *Use caution in the kitchen.*  
Carefully wash fruits and vegetable and cook shellfish thoroughly. Also, routinely disinfect cutting boards and counters.
3. *Refrain from preparing foods while infected with norovirus.*  
Individuals with norovirus illness should not prepare food for others while they are with symptoms and then for at least 2-3 days after being symptom free.
4. *Clean and disinfect contaminated surfaces appropriately and effectively.*  
Wipe down contaminated surfaces with a bleach-based household cleaner as directed on the product's label.
5. *Wash laundry immediately and thoroughly.*  
Handle soiled items carefully as not to spread the virus. Use rubber gloves if possible. Remove contaminated clothes and linens and wash all items with detergent, followed by machine drying.

The main take-away from “Norovirus 101” is to avoid spreading germs to others and to protect yourself by **always, always** using good hand washing techniques. Also, practice the other tips to help stay norovirus free!

A few more things: have some bagels and fluids available and, of course, soft toilet paper and Kleenex!!!!

Sincerely,

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