

Norovirus outbreaks increasing in England

The advice comes after [routine surveillance](#) shows that the number of outbreaks caused by the vomiting bug has increased in recent weeks (5-week period from end May to July), particularly in early year educational settings, and that cases are returning to pre-pandemic levels across all age groups and settings in England.

Norovirus is highly infectious and causes vomiting and diarrhoea but usually passes in a couple of days. It is easily transmitted through contact with infected individuals or contaminated surfaces. The increase in outbreaks has been mostly in educational settings, particularly in nursery and childcare facilities, with far more incidents reported to PHE than would be expected in the summer months. In the last 5 weeks, 154 outbreaks have been reported, compared to an average of 53 outbreaks reported over the same time period in the previous 5 years.

The overall number of laboratory confirmed norovirus reports across all age groups has also recently increased to the levels seen in previous years before the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Professor Saheer Gharbia, Deputy Director, National Infection Service, PHE, said:

Norovirus, commonly known as the winter vomiting bug, has been at lower levels than normal throughout the pandemic with less opportunity to spread between people in the community but as restrictions have eased we have seen an increase in cases across all age groups.

Symptoms include sudden onset of nausea, projectile vomiting and diarrhoea but can also include a high temperature, abdominal pain and aching limbs. Stay at home if you are experiencing norovirus symptoms and do not return to work or send children to school or nursery until 48 hours after symptoms have cleared. As with COVID-19, handwashing is really important to help stop the spread of this bug, but remember, unlike for COVID-19 alcohol gels do not kill off norovirus so soap and water is best.

How to reduce the spread of norovirus:

1. Stay at home if you are experiencing norovirus symptoms. Do not return to work or send children to school until 48 hours after symptoms have cleared. Also avoid visiting elderly or poorly relatives, particularly if they are in hospital.
2. Wash your hands frequently and thoroughly with soap and warm water. Alcohol hand gels don't kill norovirus.

3. When an infected person vomits, the droplets contaminate the surrounding surfaces. A bleach-based household cleaner or a combination of bleach and hot water should be used to disinfect potentially contaminated household surfaces and commonly used objects such as toilets, taps, telephones, door handles and kitchen surfaces.
4. If you are ill, avoid cooking and helping prepare meals for others until 48 hours after symptoms have stopped, as norovirus can be spread through food contaminated by the virus when food is handled by symptomatic people or infected individuals.
5. Wash any contaminated clothing or bedding using detergent and at 60°C, and if possible, wear disposable gloves to handle contaminated items.

Norovirus activity is now increasing and it is possible that unusual or out of season increases could be seen in the coming months. following further easing of COVID-19 control measures. PHE's National Norovirus Surveillance Team will continue to closely monitor all available surveillance data to ensure early detection of any unusual norovirus activity and outbreaks.

Those showing symptoms should avoid visiting their GP but if they are concerned should contact NHS 111 or talk to their GP by phone.