

# Patient information

## Norovirus

### What is Norovirus?

Norovirus is the most common cause of infectious gastroenteritis in the UK. It is often called the "winter vomiting bug" however outbreaks of infection can occur at any time of the year. The main symptoms are vomiting and /or diarrhoea, although some people may also complain of a headache and fever. Although it is a very unpleasant infection, the symptoms usually last only 2-3 days and it does not require any specific treatment. It is highly contagious and spreads very quickly in environments where people come into close contact with each other eg schools or cruise ships. It is a particular problem in the hospital environment because if large numbers of patients, visitors and staff become infected this can cause distress and discomfort to those affected.

It is very difficult to prevent the infection from being brought into the hospital as people can develop the symptoms very suddenly. Those that have the illness can remain infectious for up to 48 hours after their last symptom. For this reason we ask that any **visitors who have had symptoms of diarrhoea and/or vomiting do not visit the hospital until they have been symptom-free for at least 48 hours.** Patients, who become unwell whilst in hospital, may be transferred into a single room until they have recovered. If a number of patients on a ward become unwell, then the ward will be closed in order to prevent the spread of infection to others

### Frequently asked questions

#### Is there a treatment for Norovirus infection?

No. Antibiotics are not used to treat norovirus infection. The main treatment is rest, and to make sure you have plenty of fluids to prevent you from becoming dehydrated.

#### Can I have visitors?

In the event of a ward closure visiting will be restricted to evenings only. This is to prevent the spread of infection to visitors and to allow for additional ward cleaning to be carried out. If a ward is closed, ward staff will make every effort to contact patients' next of kin to advise them. In some circumstances, immediate family or significant others may be allowed to visit at other times (this is at the discretion of the senior nurse in charge of the ward.) If you have any concerns please ask to speak to the ward manager or Matron

## **How can we stop norovirus infection from spreading?**

### **Hand hygiene**

Washing your hands with soap and water is the most effective way of preventing the spread of norovirus infection. Alcohol hand rubs should not be used as they are **not** effective against the virus and will not stop the spread of infection.

### **Staff**

All our staff members at the West Suffolk Hospital are trained in the most effective way to clean their hands when caring for patients. You can expect staff to clean their hands:

- Before they carry out any patient care
- After they have completed patient care
- Before serving food and drinks
- After contact with the patients surroundings
- After assisting patients to use the commode or toilet
- Between caring for one patient and another

### **Patients**

Patients are advised to clean their hands after going to the lavatory, before meals or if your hands are visibly dirty. The nursing staff are there to give you help with this should you need it. Small hand wipes are available for you to use if you are unable to get to a wash hand basin.

### **Visitors**

Visitors are advised to wash their hands with soap and water on entering the ward and when they leave at the end of their visit. You should also wash your hands if you are helping your relative/friend with eating and/or drinking or helping them go to the toilet.

Visitors may use the ward wash hand basins. In the event of a ward closure an additional mobile wash hand basin will be placed at the entrance to the ward.

### **Further information**

Please ask a member of the nursing staff if you have any queries or concerns. Nursing staff can also contact the Infection Prevention Team if you require further information.

For further information please refer to the following websites:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/public-health-england>

<http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/norovirus>

*If you would like any information regarding access to the West Suffolk Hospital and its facilities please visit the disabledgo website link below:*

*<http://www.disabledgo.com/organisations/west-suffolk-nhs-foundation-trust/main>*

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