

Six Tips to Help Prevent the Spread of Norovirus

[Announcer] This program is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Norovirus is a very contagious virus that can make you sick with severe diarrhea and vomiting. Luckily, there are a few simple things you can do to protect yourself and your family. Hi. I'm Dr. Aron Hall from CDC.

You may have heard norovirus illness called the "stomach flu," but it isn't related to the flu. It's not food poisoning either; it's an infection. Norovirus is the leading cause of foodborne illness in the U.S., but it's not the only one.

Norovirus illness is very common. You or someone you know has probably had it. It occurs most often from November to April. Every year, about 20 million people in the United States get sick with it. There are different types of noroviruses, so you can get sick with it more than once.

Symptoms include stomach pain, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and sometimes fever. Most people recover in one to three days, but young children and older adults can get really sick and may need to be hospitalized. It can even cause death.

Norovirus spreads very easily. People who have the virus are more likely to spread it while they have symptoms and for three days after their symptoms stop. When people are contagious, they shed *billions* of virus particles. You can get infected if particles get in your mouth and you swallow them. This can happen if you have close contact with someone who is infected, if you eat food or drink liquids that are contaminated with the virus, or if you touch contaminated objects or surfaces and then put your fingers in your mouth. Here are six tips to help protect you and your family.

First, wash your hands often with soap and water. This is very important *before* you eat or prepare food, and *after* you use the toilet or change diapers. If soap and water aren't available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. It can reduce the number of germs on your hands, but it isn't a substitute for soap and water.

Second, rinse fruits and vegetables before you prepare or eat them. Make sure that counters, cutting boards, and utensils are clean and disinfected. It only takes a small amount of norovirus to make you sick.

The third tip is, cook shellfish, like oysters, thoroughly. Norovirus is hard to kill. It can survive low cooking temperatures, so make sure you cook shellfish to 140 degrees or higher. A quick steaming will *not* get the job done.

Tip number four - Don't prepare food or care for others while you're sick with norovirus. This is especially important if you work with food or in healthcare facilities, schools, or day care. Make sure you wait two to three days after you're symptom-free before you prepare food or care for others.

The fifth tip is, clean surfaces and counters and then disinfect them with a bleach solution. After someone vomits or has diarrhea, immediately clean and disinfect contaminated surfaces in the area where the incident occurred. Placing food contaminated with norovirus on a clean kitchen counter or cutting board can transfer the virus to those surfaces. To prevent this, routinely disinfect counters, cutting boards, and utensils.

The last tip is remove and wash clothes and linens that are soiled with vomit or feces. Wear rubber gloves and wash your hands after touching these items. Wash clothes and linens with detergent for the maximum cycle length, then tumble dry.

Practice these prevention tips to help stay norovirus-free. To learn more, visit cdc.gov/norovirus.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov, or call 1-800-CDC-INFO.