



**Southend University  
Hospital**  
NHS Foundation Trust

# Patient Information Service

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## **Winter vomiting disease (norovirus)**



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This leaflet has been produced for patients by the infection control department to explain about winter vomiting disease and why precautions are necessary in hospital.

Winter vomiting disease is caused by a highly infectious virus known as norovirus – also known as ‘Norwalk – like virus’ (NLV) and ‘small round structured virus’ (SRSV). Most outbreaks occur in the winter months or early spring, but can occur throughout the year. Outbreaks are well known to affect cruise ships, hotels as well as hospitals and other healthcare facilities.

## **What are the symptoms?**

- sudden onset of nausea, vomiting, abdominal cramps and diarrhoea
- a general feeling of being unwell
- headache
- fever.

The symptoms usually last for 12 to 48 hours, but in severe cases could last for a week or longer. It is important to know that people who have had winter vomiting disease are still infectious for up to 48 hours after the symptoms have stopped.

## **What is the incubation period?**

Usually between 24 to 48 hours.

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## **What is the source of the infection?**

The virus that causes winter vomiting disease is found in the gastrointestinal tract (gut) of humans. It is unclear why the virus seems to appear mainly in the winter months apparently from nowhere. Normally many cases have occurred in the community before hospitals experience a problem with this virus. Typically problems begin when a patient is admitted while incubating the virus.

## **How is the infection spread?**

Winter vomiting disease is highly infectious and is easily spread from person to person. Only a small number of viruses are needed to cause an infection and many millions are present in the vomit and stool of someone infected.

The most likely ways for the virus to be transmitted are:

- From airborne aerosol droplets when a person with the infection vomits or has an episode of diarrhoea
- Contaminated surfaces such as toilets, taps, door handles and other surfaces.

## **How could it affect me?**

Although these symptoms are usually short lived, the infection can still be passed on up to 48 hours afterwards. For this reason discharging a patient to a nursing or residential home may be delayed until we are sure there is no risk of further spread. We sometimes have to close wards to new admissions until all

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patients and staff have recovered. If you do become unwell with this infection, you may be moved into a side room or share an area on the ward with other patients who have the same symptoms.

## **How will this affect my family and friends?**

Although affected wards may remain open to visitors, it is advisable to avoid visiting the very young and elderly, as they can become more unwell than others if they contract the virus. Relatives and others should avoid visiting an infected person who is in hospital until two days have passed without symptoms. Similarly they should not visit if they themselves have symptoms of vomiting or diarrhoea. Children under ten should be discouraged from visiting as they may be more susceptible to the virus.

**In an attempt to control the spread of infection, visitors should not visit other wards in the hospital after entering an affected ward.**

## **What precautions should be taken?**

As only a small number of the viruses are needed to cause infection, good hand hygiene is essential to reduce the risk of spreading the infection from person to person.

**Hands should always be washed thoroughly:**

- after using the toilet
- before eating anything.

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## What is the treatment?

There is no specific treatment for winter vomiting disease. Antibiotics are not prescribed because they do not destroy viruses. The main treatment is to drink plenty of fluids. If as a patient or member of staff you have diarrhoea and vomiting, a stool sample will be sent to the laboratory for testing.

**Visitors and staff should always use the hand sanitiser on entering and leaving the ward.**

We hope this general information is useful. Please ask a member of staff if there is any additional information you would like. Alternatively the infection control team can be contacted on **01702 435555 ext 6639, 6986, 6919 or 6988.**





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If this leaflet does not answer all of your questions, or if you have any other concerns please contact the infection control department on **01702 435555 ext 6639, 6986, 6919 or 6988.**

[www.southend.nhs.uk](http://www.southend.nhs.uk)

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