

ADVICE SHEET FOR GENERAL PRACTICES

NOROVIRUS

1. Introduction

As we enter the winter months we often see more episodes of suspected norovirus across Nottinghamshire County. In recent years we have seen increasing numbers of norovirus outbreaks in care homes, hospitals and schools. This advice sheet is to advise General Practitioners and their staff on infection prevention and control precautions in the event of a patient having symptoms of the virus or staff members going off sick with the virus. Care homes experiencing suspected outbreaks will be asked to close to admissions and will be encouraged to obtain a stool sample for virology testing from some of those affected to establish a cause where this is possible and support with this is appreciated.

2. About norovirus

Noroviruses are non-enveloped viruses belonging to the *Caliciviridae* group of viruses. These viruses are sometimes referred to as: Norwalk viruses, winter vomiting disease and Small Round-structured Viruses. They cause acute onset of watery diarrhoea with or without vomiting, which may be projectile. Symptoms can include: abdominal cramps, muscle pain, headache, malaise and a low grade fever. The incubation period is normally 12-48 hours and the symptoms last 1-2 days.

Patients and staff should be considered infectious whilst they are symptomatic and until 48 hours after the symptoms have stopped. Norovirus should be suspected in anyone who has a sudden onset of diarrhoea and vomiting. Infection is via the faecal-oral route and via contact with surfaces and equipment that have been contaminated with the aerosol spray generated by a patient with the virus vomiting.

3. Infection prevention and control

Ideally where norovirus is suspected or diagnosed and the patient requires a GP, they must be seen at home; however, the following precautions should be taken if a patient is treated at the surgery and is suspected to be infected with norovirus:

- Only treat a patient with norovirus symptoms in an emergency and try to carry out treatment at the end of the session.
- Where a patient with suspected norovirus is treated within the practice, any vomit should be cleaned up immediately using the spillage kit and disposable paper towels. Disposable latex or nitrile gloves, apron and mask should be worn and the soiled waste and paper towels should be disposed of into clinical waste. The immediate area should be disinfected using a hypochlorite solution e.g. Milton 2% (1:20) (beware of using hypochlorites on carpets, due to staining). Use hot soapy water to finish (also for use on carpets). Dispose of all cleaning cloths as well as gloves and apron and mask carefully into clinical waste.
- Toilets used by affected patients or staff should be thoroughly cleaned with detergent and water, followed by a hypochlorite solution as above.
- Liquid soap and water should be used for cleaning hands after contact with the affected patient and following glove removal after cleaning up. Hands should be washed using the correct technique which includes wrists and they should be rinsed thoroughly to remove the virus, followed by careful drying. **(please note: basic alcohol gel is not effective against norovirus – only specialist gels are effective against these viruses)**

- After the patient has been treated, the whole clinic area should be cleaned including floors, work surfaces, cabinets, chair, lights, and all other equipment, using detergent followed by hypochlorite solution (as above or follow manufacturer cleaning instructions if not recommended). Curtains should be washed or replaced and blinds cleaned. Clinical waste bags should be sealed before removing them to a secure cupboard or room away from public access.
- All cleaning cloths and mop heads should be disposed of and buckets cleaned with hypochlorite solution.
- Staff should change out of uniforms and place them into plastic bags, to be washed separately at the hottest temperature the fabric will allow.

4. The following precautions should be taken if a member of staff has symptoms of norovirus:

- The member of staff should go home immediately and stay off work until 48 hours after symptoms have stopped. Advise that they do not go to their GP surgery or A&E - unless their condition deteriorates or have other serious underlying health problems - if this is the case they should contact the GP for advice – the illness is usually self-limiting and you may infect others by visiting the surgery.
- Contact the Occupational Health Department to report the illness.
- Where the staff member has had diarrhoea and vomiting at work, the affected areas will need a thorough clean as in Section 3.
- If there is more than one case of the virus, contact the Public Health England (PHE) on: 0344 225 4524

For any further advice please contact:

Sally Bird
Head of Infection Prevention & Control Team
Mansfield & Ashfield CCG
Telephone: 01623 673477

Wendy Walker /Nikki Hughes
Infection Control Matrons
Mansfield & Ashfield CCG
Telephone: 01623 673071/673299

Web link for further information <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/norovirus-guidance-data-and-analysis>