Norovirus

What is norovirus?

- Norovirus is the most common cause of gastroenteritis in adults and children. It causes nausea, vomiting and diarrhea, often in an “outbreak” type situation. It is very common, with over 20 million cases per year in the USA.
- The good news about norovirus is that while it’s uncomfortable, it is rarely dangerous and it usually resolves quickly with some rest and self-care at home.

How do I get it?

- You can get norovirus from an infected person, contaminated food or water, or by touching contaminated surfaces. It typically takes 1-2 days from exposure to getting the symptoms.

How can I prevent it?

- Wash your hands, OFTEN! Use soap and water; sometimes hand disinfectants are not enough.
- Rinse your fruits and veggies before eating them, and thoroughly cook shellfish before eating.
- Clean surfaces using a bleach mixture, and launder any potentially contaminated clothing and linens.
- If you are feeling sick with nausea, vomiting or diarrhea, don’t prepare foods or care for other people. You can possibly “shed” the virus for up to 3 weeks after you first became ill.

What should I do if I think I have norovirus?

- Take care of yourself! The best things you can do for yourself are resting and keeping yourself hydrated. See below for some tips for keeping yourself hydrated and comfortable while you wait for the virus to resolve.

Should I be seen at the Student Health Center?

- Likely not! Norovirus is a viral disease and won’t respond to antibiotics - no medicine will make it go away faster. You’ll probably feel better in 3 to 5 days. Hydration is the most important thing you can do to alleviate your symptoms. But be aware of the “When should I see a provider?” list below. If you experience anything on that list, call Student Health at 802-656-3350. We can help determine if you need a medical evaluation here or may need any special treatments like IV fluids.

Self Care for Vomiting

Vomiting is a common symptom of viral gastroenteritis and usually resolves within a few days without any medical intervention. Vomiting can be more risky than diarrhea as it may be difficult to keep liquids down, so monitor yourself for dehydration. Follow these guidelines to make yourself more comfortable:

1. To make up for the water your body is losing, drink lots of clear fluids. Choose sports drinks (Gatorade), coconut water, or fruit juices diluted with water. Take small sips every 5-10 minutes to stay hydrated. Don’t try to eat solid food until you have stopped vomiting.

2. Once you feel able to tolerate it, try introducing bland foods such as crackers or clear soups. If you can keep down crackers, you might try the BRAT diet: bananas, rice, applesauce and toast.

3. If you are supposed to take medication and you aren’t able to keep it down, call Student Health Services.

Self Care for Diarrhea

Diarrhea (frequent or loose bowel movements) is a common symptom of viral gastroenteritis and usually resolves within a few days. However, there is some danger of becoming dehydrated. You can prevent this from happening and make yourself more comfortable by following these guidelines:

1. To make up for the water your body is losing, drink lots of clear fluids. Your body needs calories, so choose sports drinks (Gatorade), coconut water, or fruit juices diluted with water.

2. Avoid dairy products, as well as anything greasy or fatty, as this can make diarrhea worse. Try lean meats, vegetables, and whole grain bread. If you’re also vomiting, try the BRAT diet (in the previous column).

When should I see a provider?

- Your vomiting or diarrhea has not resolved in 72 hours, or you feel worse after 24-48 hours
- You haven’t been able to keep down food or water for 24 hours
- You’re experiencing signs of dehydration: dry mouth, dry eyes, thirst, or a decrease in urination
- You notice you are confused or unusually drowsy
- You have a prolonged or high fever
- There is blood in your stool

Learn more

For more info, check out the CDC website on norovirus:
http://www.cdc.gov/norovirus/