

Norovirus Guidelines for Food Service



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What is Norovirus?

Norovirus is a very contagious virus that is the most common cause of gastroenteritis, which is the inflammation of the stomach and intestines. As few as 10 viral particles may be enough to infect a person. Its name is from the original strain, Norwalk virus, which caused an outbreak on Halloween in Norwalk, Ohio in 1968. More commonly known as the stomach flu, Norovirus infections are most common during winter months. Like all viruses, Norovirus cannot be treated with antibiotics or grow outside the human body, but can survive up to a week on inanimate objects such as door handles and bathroom surfaces.

What are the symptoms and how does it spread?

Once the virus enters the body, symptoms usually occur between 24 and 50 hours. Symptoms will usually last 1-3 days.

Common symptoms:

- nausea, diarrhea, vomiting, abdominal cramps
- these symptoms may be accompanied by headache, chills, fever, muscle aches

Outbreaks caused by Norovirus often result from person to person spread such as direct contact with an infected person or from consumption of contaminated food, ice or drinks. Contaminated environmental surfaces, such as door handles and stair railings, may also act as a source of exposure by touching a contaminated surface and then putting hands in the mouth, nose or on the face.

What are the risks?

A Norovirus infection will usually pass naturally in 1-3 days. Excessive vomiting and diarrhea can create dehydration from rapid water loss throughout the body. It is important for those infected to drink lots of fluids, like water and non-acidic juice that will replenish essential salts, electrolytes, and sugars without further upsetting the stomach. An infection can become a serious health hazard to high-risk populations such as the elderly, young children, and people with already weakened immune systems.

How can Norovirus be prevented?

As with any health hazard, it is best to prevent a Norovirus outbreak before it spreads and becomes a problem for the entire community. Here are simple ways to prevent exposures:

- Wash your hands! Wash frequently with soap and warm water, especially after using the bathroom, sneezing or coughing.
- Disinfect all common area surfaces, such as dining room tables and door knobs that people commonly touch. Keep the bathroom and kitchen areas clean and sanitized.

- Wash fresh produce and prepare foods safely. Keep food out of the danger zone (41-135°F) and always make sure meat and fish are cooked thoroughly.
- Keep sick people home until symptoms have subsided for 24 hours. If someone is a food handler, they should stay home for 48 hours.

How to disinfect for Norovirus?

Chlorine bleach (sodium hypochlorite) is the most effective disinfectant against Norovirus.

For cleaning spills of vomit or diarrhea, a two-step process should be used:

*Use personal protective equipment, such as gloves and masks.

1. Pre-cleaning of visible debris with absorbent material (double layer and placed in a plastic bag to minimize exposure to airborne particles).
2. Liberally disinfect area and objects surrounding the contamination with a chlorine bleach solution at the correct concentration.

Disinfection guidelines:

Proper Bleach Use with 8.25% sodium hypochlorite

| Purpose | Final ppm | Dilution | Contact time | Follow up procedure |
|--|-----------|--------------------------------|--------------|--|
| Norovirus Disinfecting (examples: Norovirus outbreak or gastrointestinal outbreak of unknown etiology) | 5000 | 1 cup bleach: 1 gallon water** | 1 minute | Air dry or dry with paper towel. Food contact surfaces must be rinsed and sanitized. |

Disinfection Precautions:

Product label must contain language stating approval for use in (FDA or USDA) food facilities and provide appropriate directions for further information on approval for use on food contact surfaces and/or in food service facilities. There are numerous commercially available products that EPA has registered as appropriate for disinfection for norovirus; here is the link to these listings:

<http://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-g-epa-registered-hospital-disinfectants-effective-against-norovirus>

A bleach solution must be changed every 30 minutes with a new cloth towel used to prevent contamination.

Examples of items to disinfect:

Doorknobs, faucets, sinks, toilets, phones, counters, chairs, dining room tables, hand rails, light switches, keyboards, aprons, uniforms, ice machines, etc.

**IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS
PLEASE CALL OUR OFFICE AND ASK FOR THE FOOD PROGRAM AT 847-377-8020**