

Medicine for Managers

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Norovirus

Winter will soon be upon us and viruses galore will be disrupting our work and daily living. The names of particular viruses will be in the press, the visual media and in medical publications. One of the favourites will be the norovirus. Commonly referred to as the winter vomiting bug, it does cause an acute gastroenteritis with vomiting and diarrhoea, together with the more 'flu-like symptoms of headache, temperature, aches and pains.

The virus usually has an incubation period of about 12-48 hours depending on the nature of the exposure, and the health of the sufferer. It is very infectious. It usually strikes acutely with:

- Severe and sudden-onset nausea and vomiting
- Cramp-like abdominal pain
- General viral symptoms such as headache, generalised aching, malaise and a raised temperature.

This is followed in a matter of a hours by:

- Loose or watery diarrhoea

Although the infection is called a winter bug, it can be acquired at any time during the year.

The virus is easily acquired, transmitted and spread by:

- Contact with an infected person
- Eating or drinking contaminated food
- Contact with an infected surface and then touching the mouth
- Aerosol droplets from proximity to an infected vomiting individual

The infection usually resolves within three days and the vomiting and diarrhoea can normally be treated at home.

The key to effective management is to prevent dehydration. When feeling sick it can be difficult to tolerate fluids but they are essential to the resolution of the infection and the symptoms.

The main principles of treatment are:

- ***Prevent dehydration*.** Fluid replacement is essential. Water should be consumed very frequently by repeated sipping, and the use of electrolyte solutions. Products such as *Diorylate©* are valuable and can be obtained from the pharmacy. They contain essential minerals such as sodium, potassium, calcium and magnesium. They aid hydration by replacement of

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electrolytes, helping to pull water in more efficiently, improving bodily functions, helping to restore energy and balancing fluid levels.

- ***Rest***. Relax until the acute symptoms have subsided and resume eating bland food when there has been no diarrhoea for 12-24 hours.

- ***Avoid contact with others*** until at least 48 hours from the last symptoms.

- ***Ensure rigorous hygiene***, washing hands thoroughly using soap and water and cleaning contacted surface with a proprietary household cleaner.

To avoid catching norovirus**:**

- Avoid close contact with someone with norovirus if possible, including consuming anything prepared by someone with the virus
- Do not touch surfaces or items likely to have norovirus on them and then touching the mouth.

The key actions to tackle to avoid acquiring the virus are:

- ***Wash your hands*** thoroughly with soap and water after any contact with an infected individual or surface

- ***Separate any bedding or towels*** used by an infected person and wash them separately

- ***Clean any toilet facilities*** thoroughly with a proprietary disinfectant

If you do acquire the infection

- ***Stay away from anyone***, particularly if vulnerable or elderly, until you are free of any symptoms for 2-3 days.

Stay well this winter.

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