

## Norovirus

In November 2021, 13 cases of norovirus were reported from Kerala. In May the same year, more than a hundred cases of the highly contagious virus were reported in the UK. What is norovirus? How is norovirus transmitted? How can it be prevented? Get answers to all these questions in this article. This is an important topic for the [UPSC exam](#) health segment.

### What is Norovirus?

Norovirus is a highly contagious virus that causes gastrointestinal illnesses such as vomiting and diarrhoea.

- The virus causes inflammation in the stomach lining and the intestines.
- Norovirus symptoms:
  - Diarrhoea
  - Vomiting
  - Stomach pain
  - Nausea
  - Gastrointestinal problems
  - Fever
  - Headache
  - Body ache
- A person usually develops symptoms 12 to 48 hours after being exposed to norovirus. Most people with norovirus illness get better within 1 to 3 days.
- Norovirus is resistant to many common hand sanitisers and also to many disinfectants. It can also survive heat up to 60 degrees Celsius, so merely steaming food or chlorinating water does nothing to destroy the virus.
- Norovirus is also called stomach flu or stomach bug although it is unrelated to the flu caused by the influenza virus.
- Norovirus can affect people of all ages but the elderly, children and people with comorbidities are especially vulnerable.
- Every year, about 2 lakh people die because of norovirus and this includes about 50000 children.

### How is Norovirus Transmitted?

Norovirus can be transmitted from an infected person to a healthy person through direct contact. It is also transmitted by consuming contaminated food or water (oral-faecal), and also by touching contaminated surfaces and then putting the unwashed hands into the mouth.

- Norovirus spreads easily since infected people can shed billions of norovirus particles and only a few virus particles can make other people sick.
- There are different types of noroviruses and people can be affected by the viruses multiple times in their lives.
- Immunity towards one type does not mean another type of norovirus cannot affect the person.
- This explains why many people across age groups get infected during an outbreak.

### **Norovirus - Prevention and Treatment**

Norovirus can be prevented by following proper hand hygiene and other preventive tips.

- Handwashing with soap and water after using the toilet or changing diapers.
- Handwashing with soap and water before eating and cooking/handling food.
- Washing fruits and vegetables thoroughly before use.
- People interacting with animals should take special care.
- People living in areas that are prone to norovirus outbreaks should drink chlorinated water.

### **Treatment for norovirus**

- There is no treatment as such for norovirus by the symptoms such as diarrhoea and vomiting can be managed by taking generic medicines for them.
  - Infected people should take plenty of warm water to prevent dehydration.
  - The illness is self-limiting and it usually lasts for 2 - 3 days, although it can cause a lot of distress to the patient.
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