

Six simple steps to protect against and stop the spread of noroviruses

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Recent outbreaks of norovirus—also known as stomach flu—indicate the highly contagious, fast-moving virus is again a public health concern. The Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology (APIC) has six simple steps to protect families against noroviruses.

Norovirus is the second most frequent cause of illness after the common cold. Symptoms include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and abdominal pain, and occur between 24 and 48 hours after exposure. Norovirus can be life-threatening for the elderly and immunocompromised.

APIC's six simple steps to protect against norovirus include:

1. Practice Proper Hand Hygiene

Frequent hand washing is always the best defense. This includes washing hands for at least 15 seconds (sing the happy birthday song twice) or using hand sanitizers containing at least 60 percent alcohol – rubbing until hands are dry.

2. Clean with Bleach

If you've had the bug, use a bleach-containing cleaner to disinfect all surfaces. Wear disposable gloves, and don't forget "frequent touch" surfaces like door knobs and light switches. After cleaning, dispose of or sanitize rags in hot water and bleach.

3. Food and Water Safety

Avoid joining an estimated 9.2 million cases of foodborne norovirus infections each year by preventing food contamination. Always wash raw food before eating, and don't eat food prepared by someone who is ill until 2-3 days after symptoms have cleared.

4. Don't Air Your Dirty Laundry

Direct contact with a sick person is not required to contaminate soft surfaces. The norovirus can spread from a contaminated pillowcase to a clean towel in a pile of laundry. To disinfect laundry, wash with hot water and dry on "high." Add bleach to wash if heavily soiled with vomit or feces.

5. Contain Outbreaks

Immediately quarantine those who are sick. Don't forget to disinfect everything from the washing machine to the bleach bottle, and wear protective gloves while cleaning.

6. Prevent Outbreaks

Don't wait for an outbreak to occur to clean up. Ward off norovirus by maintaining a clean household and regularly disinfecting surfaces.

Source: Association for Professionals in Infection Control

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