

# Infectious diseases A-Z: Norovirus cases rise in winter months

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Norovirus is a highly contagious viral infection that is commonly referred to as "stomach flu." However, it is not related to the flu, which is caused by the influenza virus.

"Norovirus is a virus that causes gastroenteritis," says Dr. Nipunie Rajapakse, a pediatric infectious diseases specialist at Mayo Clinic.

"Someone who is infected with norovirus may have vomiting, nausea, abdominal pain and diarrhea. Generally, in otherwise healthy people, it's

a relatively brief illness," says Dr. Rajapakse.

Norovirus symptoms can last 24 or 48 hours, and also may include fever, headache and body ache. Most people will recover on their own.

Antibiotics, which only work against bacteria, will not help you recover from a viral [infection](#) such as norovirus.

Drinking plenty of fluids to avoid becoming dehydrated is important.

"Norovirus is very contagious," says Dr. Rajapakse. "You only need a small number of virus particles in order to get sick. It's also relatively hearty. It lives quite well on surfaces. Even if you're not in direct contact with someone that's sick, you can easily pick it up off of a surface or through food that's been contaminated and get sick yourself."

While there are no medications to cure norovirus, Dr. Rajapakse says the most important thing that people can do to protect themselves from the viral infection is practice good hand hygiene.

"It's also important to know that you can shed the norovirus in your stool for sometimes as long as, and even longer than, two weeks after you get sick. If you know that you've recently had a norovirus infection, it's really important to wash your hands well after using the bathroom so that you're not transmitting it to other people."

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention also recommends avoiding the preparation of food for others when sick and for two days after symptoms stop.

Norovirus outbreaks can happen anytime but occur most often between November and April.

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