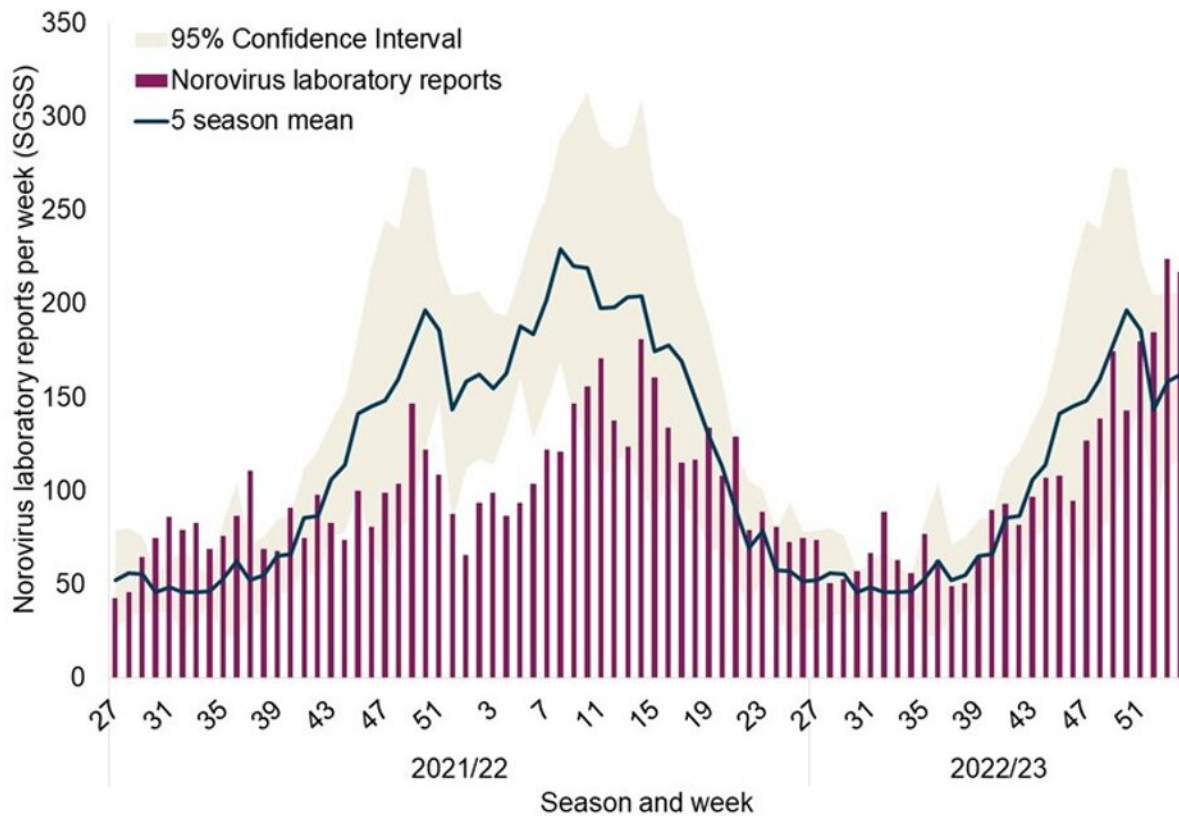


# Unusual norovirus activity sees UK cases soar 37% higher than pre-pandemic average

January 27 2023



Norovirus laboratory reports in England by week during 2021/2022 and 2022/2023 seasons, compared to 5-season average. Credit: *National norovirus and rotavirus report, week 4 report: data up to week 2 (15 January 2023) (2023)*.

Cases of norovirus, commonly known as winter vomiting sickness, have

soared by 37% compared to the same period pre-COVID. Today's report from the UK Health Safety Agency (UKHSA) says cases for the first two weeks in January jumped by 37% over the five season average pre-pandemic, with over 65s reporting the steepest rise.

A leading testing expert is concerned that the changing pattern may indicate a further surge to come. He cautions that the virus has not returned to its overall pre-pandemic seasonal trend this [winter](#) and warns [health professionals](#) to take note of the UKHSA's observation that "unusual norovirus activity will continue throughout the 2022/23 season."

Dr. Quinton Fivelman Ph.D., chief scientific officer at London Medical Laboratory, says, "Norovirus is a very unpleasant virus. As its common name, winter vomiting bug, implies, it often causes sickness and diarrhea. Other symptoms can include a fever, headache and aching arms and legs. Typically, it doesn't last very long and usually goes away in two to three days, but it can lead to complications. In particular, children and the elderly can be badly affected by this virus and may require hospital treatment."

"The obvious concern is that the NHS has no spare capacity to deal with a further epidemic this winter, on top of COVID, flu and Strep A outbreaks. With industrial action in the [health](#) service set to escalate, increasing cases of norovirus couldn't come at a worse time."

"Commonly, the most serious complication from norovirus is dehydration, particularly if you or your child cannot keep fluids down. In the case of babies and [young children](#), seek [medical advice](#) if they stop breast or bottle feeding, or if they show other signs of dehydration such as fewer wet nappies."

"You should call 111 if you (or your child) have bloody diarrhea or

bleeding from the bottom, diarrhea for more than seven days or vomiting for more than two to three days."

"Concerning though this sudden jump in cases is, the good news is that it is unlikely that we are seeing a new mutation, despite the warning of 'unusual' activity. This winter, the main strain continues to be genogroup 2 (GII) that makes up 74% of cases, with the main genotype being GII.4, causing 32% of cases. Last winter, GII caused 90% of cases and GII.4 specifically 48%."

"Rather than any new variant, the main reason for this month's spike in cases is likely to be that immunity against norovirus is fairly short-lived and during the pandemic fewer people were exposed to the virus than normal. Now everyone is mixing again, cases are increasing. This virus spreads very easily and quickly, more so than the other viruses causing illness this winter."

"With our immunity down, it's sensible to take precautions to avoid this unpleasant virus, if possible. You can catch norovirus from:"

- close contact with someone with the virus
- touching surfaces or objects that have the [virus](#) on them, then touching your mouth
- eating food that's been prepared or handled by someone with norovirus

"As with COVID, washing your hands frequently with soap and water is the best way to stop it spreading. However, it's important to note that alcohol hand gels don't kill this bug."

"A general health test might be a useful course of action for anyone concerned, to ensure they are in [good health](#) to fight infections and reduce the likelihood of needing access to [health services](#) this winter.

London Medical Laboratory's General Health Profile Test provides people with a comprehensive check-up of their general health, including diabetes (HbA1c), gout, liver & [kidney function](#), bone health, iron levels and a full cholesterol profile. Other more comprehensive tests check your vitamin D levels, which are often low at this time of year, and any potential thyroid or hormonal imbalances."

"They can be taken at home through the post, or at one of the many drop-in clinics that offer these tests across London and nationwide in over 90 selected pharmacies and health stores. If done in-store, a full blood test can be added that can indicate a wide range of issues such as infection, anemia and leukemia."

**More information:** Report: [www.gov.uk/government/statistics/2023-01-15-january-2023](http://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/2023-01-15-january-2023)

Provided by London Medical Laboratory

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