

Norovirus spikes across the Northeast

February 27 2024, by Rick Sobey, Boston Herald



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The "stomach bug" is unfortunately making the rounds these days. Norovirus rates in the Northeast are now at their highest levels since April, according to the CDC. The positive "stomach flu" rates in the Northeast are currently higher than the rest of the country.

Most norovirus is spread by people who didn't wash their hands after going to the bathroom, the CDC said Feb. 26.

"Norovirus is a very contagious virus that can cause vomiting and diarrhea," the CDC posted. "Anyone can get infected and sick with norovirus, but washing your hands can help to prevent it."

Norovirus outbreaks happen most frequently during the late fall, winter, and early spring. Norovirus illness is not related to the flu, which is caused by [influenza virus](#). Other than vomiting and diarrhea, norovirus symptoms include fever, headache and body aches.

Across the Northeast during the last month, more than 13% of norovirus tests have been positive on a consistent basis. Those positive rates were higher last February and March.

Meanwhile, the norovirus positive rates in the South have been less than 10% during the last month; the Midwest rates have been around 10%; and the West rates have eclipsed 12%.

Because norovirus is not a reportable condition, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health does not have case numbers.

"DPH recommends that people stay home when they are sick and practice good hand hygiene by washing with soap and water to help reduce spread," DPH said in a statement.

"Hand sanitizer doesn't work particularly well against norovirus, so washing with soap and water is best," the state agency added.

Norovirus causes inflammation of the stomach or intestines, which is called acute gastroenteritis.

A person usually develops symptoms 12 to 48 hours after being exposed to norovirus. Most people with norovirus illness get better within one to three days, but they can still spread the virus for a few days after.

"If you have norovirus illness, you can feel extremely ill, and vomit or have diarrhea many times a day," the CDC website reads. "This can lead to [dehydration](#), especially in [young children](#), [older adults](#), and people with other illnesses. Children who are dehydrated may cry with few or no tears and be unusually sleepy or fussy."

Other prevention tips for norovirus include: washing fruits and vegetables well, cooking shellfish thoroughly, and avoid preparing food for others when sick and for two days after symptoms stop.

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