



Viral gastroenteritis

outbreak guidance for Care Homes in North Yorkshire and York

What is viral gastroenteritis

- A sudden onset of diarrhoea and/or vomiting.
- Highly infectious virus spreading easily from person to person.
- Present in an infected person's vomit and faeces. Infection occurs after swallowing the virus, e.g. when eating.
- Usually due to Norovirus, often referred to as gastric flu or winter vomiting.
- Other symptoms often include nausea, stomach cramps, headache and/or a low grade fever.
- Illness is usually of a short duration and most people are better within 48 hours.
- Can cause dehydration which can be avoided by drinking plenty of fluids.
- To reduce the spread of the infection, care homes should be closed to all admissions and day care facilities suspended.
- Care homes can re-open when all residents are 48 hours symptom free and a deep clean of affected rooms and communal areas has taken place.

Handwashing

- Effective hand hygiene for both staff and residents is the single most important preventative measure.
- Liquid soap and paper towels **must** be available in each resident's room for staff use.
- Alcohol handrub should **not** be used as it does not kill viral gastroenteritis.

Cleaning and disinfection

- Clean hands, wear a disposable apron and gloves. Hands should be washed after removing and disposing of each item of PPE, e.g. pair of gloves, apron.
- Best practice is to use a spillage kit following the manufacturer's instructions or, if unavailable, soak up with paper towels, clean the area, then follow with a chlorine-based disinfectant as below.*
- Cleaning - make up a detergent based cleaning solution, e.g. pH neutral detergent and warm water.
- Disinfection - make up a fresh chlorine-based disinfectant solution every 24 hours, e.g. Milton, 2% at a dilution of 1 in 20 (50ml of Milton added to 1 litre of water).* Note: Milton Surface Spray is not chlorine-based and, therefore, will not be effective against viruses.
- Diarrhoea and/or vomit should be cleaned up immediately using a spillage kit, or soaked up with paper towels, then clean and disinfect the area as above.*
- Dispose of infectious waste in an orange coloured bag and tie securely.
- Commonly touched surfaces, e.g. toilets, taps, handrails, door handles, should be cleaned and disinfected at a minimum of twice daily as above.*
- Clean carpeted areas using warm soapy water or steam clean, do not vacuum until the deep cleaning process is undertaken.
- Toilets/commodores should be dedicated to residents with symptoms and cleaned and disinfected as above.*
- Communal toilets used by people (including staff) with symptoms, should be cleaned and disinfected immediately as above.*
- Open windows to help remove the virus from the air.
- All internal doors should be shut.
- Table cloths in dining rooms should be removed.

Do you have an outbreak?

An outbreak is defined as two or more residents and/or staff within the same area who have similar symptoms within a 48 hour time period.

Who do I notify?

In office hours: As soon as possible, inform the Community Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) Team.

01423 557340

Out of office hours:

Contact the Yorkshire and the Humber Health Protection (HP) Team for advice.

0114 304 9843

Key messages

- Evidence has shown that early recognition and implementation of this guidance will greatly reduce the severity of an outbreak.
- Refer to your local policy on 'Viral gastroenteritis/Norovirus'. Alternatively, a Policy can be downloaded at www.infectionpreventioncontrol.co.uk.
- Photocopy your policy and give to all staff to read.
- Compile a list of all residents and staff with symptoms and dates affected.
- Faecal specimen collection is essential.
- Where possible, infected residents should be isolated in their room until they are symptom free for 48 hours.
- Thorough handwashing is essential using liquid soap and warm running water.
- Clean and disinfect the environment with a chlorine-based disinfectant solution, e.g. Milton, at least twice daily.
- Good and effective communication with all staff, residents and visitors is essential.
- If a resident requires hospital admission, inform the ambulance and hospital staff of the outbreak and whether the resident is symptomatic. A copy of the 'Inter-Health and Social Care Infection Control Transfer Form' or patient passport should accompany the resident.
- An advice notice should be placed at the entrance informing visitors of the outbreak.