Diagnosis and Treatment

To diagnose Norwalk virus, a stool or vomit sample is needed. Unfortunately, once diagnosed, there are not many treatment options. Because the Norwalk virus causes viral gastroenteritis, antibiotics cannot be used for treatment. Typically, doctors will tell patients to remain hydrated by drinking a lot of fluids. Depending on how dehydrated a patient is, fluids may be given through an IV. Antiemetic medication such as promethazine can be given to relieve the symptoms in more severe cases. Other over-the-counter medications such as ibuprofen and acetaminophen may be suggested. Scientists are working diligently on creating a vaccination for the Norwalk virus, but the risks do not yet outweigh the benefits.

For More Information

If you think that you have been infected with the Norwalk virus, please visit your local doctor to confirm the diagnosis. For more information, please visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (www.cdc.gov).

Norwalk Virus Gastroenteritis

Auburn University
Department of Biological Sciences
Haley Anne Lightfoot
Dr. Sharon Roberts

Stomach Bug
Haley Anne Lightfoot
So you have the stomach bug?

Are you nauseous, throwing up, experiencing stomach pain, or have diarrhea? If so, you might be experiencing gastroenteritis caused by the Norwalk virus. Other common symptoms include a headache, fever, and body aches. Because this virus is often accompanied by dehydration, be sure to drink plenty of liquids to replace lost fluids. Symptoms of dehydration include a dry mouth and throat, feeling dizzy upon standing, and a decrease in urination. Most patients infected with Norwalk virus begin to feel better after about three days.

The Norwalk virus is the leading cause of illness from contaminated food in the United States.

To prevent yourself from contracting the Norwalk virus again, try these prevention techniques:

- Wash your fruits, vegetables, and other foods carefully
- Fully cook shellfish and other raw meat
- Keep surfaces cleaned using a disinfectant
- Wash your hands
- When sick, do not prepare meals for others
- Immediately wash laundry that could be infected with the virus

Each year, the Norwalk virus is responsible for about 21 million illnesses, 70,000 hospitalizations, and about 800 deaths. Most of the infections are during the cold winter month out of the year. Foods commonly involved in outbreaks are lettuce, fruits, and shellfish. Any raw food can still become contaminated after being cooked. Because Norwalk virus is extremely contagious, a patient can easily get the virus from a family member or someone close to them. The virus can be obtained by eating food or drinking after someone who has contaminated the food or drink with the Norwalk virus. It can also be spread by touching your mouth after touching a contaminated surface. Finally, it can be spread from sharing food or utensils with someone that is infected. The Norwalk virus is commonly found in schools, nursing homes, colleges, and on cruise ships.