



Viral Gastroenteritis due to Norovirus

Information for patients and visitors from Infection Prevention and Control

You (or someone you are visiting) have been diagnosed with viral gastroenteritis due to Norovirus. This leaflet explains the following.

- What Norovirus is.
- What the symptoms are.
- How it is spread.
- What precautions need to be taken in hospital and at home.

We hope the leaflet will help to answer some of the questions you may have. If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to a member of your healthcare team.

Easy Read and Text Only versions of this leaflet are available to view and download from the Trust web site. (<https://leaflets.ekhuft.nhs.uk/norovirus-vomiting-bug-in-hospital-easy-read-and-text-only/>)

What is Norovirus?

Viral gastroenteritis, caused by **small round structured viruses (SRSVs)**, is a frequent cause of diarrhoea and vomiting in the community. It is the most common cause of outbreaks of gastroenteritis in hospitals. These viruses are also known as winter vomiting disease, gastric' flu, and Norovirus.

What are the symptoms of Norovirus?

- The incubation period is 12 to 48 hours. This is the time between getting the virus and developing symptoms.
- The onset is very sudden, typically without any warning.
- Those affected may have either:
 - vomiting, which can be quite explosive (projectile); and / or
 - diarrhoea (runny, watery bowel action).

- Some people may also feel generally unwell and have abdominal (tummy) pain.
- The illness is self-limiting (it resolves on its own without medication). It generally lasts 1 to 3 days.
- There is no specific treatment other than rest and drinking plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration. To prevent dehydration, some elderly patients may need intravenous (IV) fluids given via a drip. Antibiotics are of no benefit against viral illnesses such as this.

How is Norovirus spread?

Norovirus is a community-acquired illness. It is present within the general community throughout the year. There are often Norovirus outbreaks in schools, colleges, nurseries, hotels, and cruise ships.

Outbreaks can occur in hospitals in a number of ways.

- A patient who is incubating the illness may be admitted to hospital and then become ill.
- Norovirus may also be brought into the hospital by visitors / members of the public who have symptoms.
- Healthcare staff may also incubate the illness and become ill on duty.

As the onset of the illness is so sudden and there are no warning signs, it is not possible to see if a person has the illness until symptoms develop. Norovirus is very infectious and can spread to other people very quickly.

What precautions does the hospital take?

Depending on the number of patients affected on a ward, it may be possible to nurse patients with symptoms in side rooms or together in one bay.

There may be times when it is necessary to close the entire ward to new patients. The ward will re-open when there have been no new cases on the ward for 72 hours.

There are some wards that cannot be closed to new admissions, such as the Critical Care and Cardiac Care Units.

Visitors must be aware that there is a risk of contracting Norovirus if they visit a patient who has symptoms or who is on a ward that has been closed. The advice of the Infection Prevention and Control Team is that members of the public do not visit unless absolutely necessary.

Can I be discharged home with Norovirus?

Patients can be discharged to their **own home** even if they have Norovirus. As long as they are generally fit for discharge and are able to manage their symptoms at home.

Patients cannot be discharged to another facility until they have been symptom free for 48 hours or until the ward has been re-opened, if they:

- have Norovirus and are awaiting discharge / transfer to a **nursing / residential home or other hospital**; or

- do not have Norovirus but are on a closed ward,

This is to stop the spread of Norovirus to patients / staff in other healthcare facilities.

Further information

If you have any questions or concerns, please speak to either the nurse-in-charge of the ward or the matron. If they are unable to help you or you need further information, please contact a member of the Infection Prevention and Control Team on:

- **Kent and Canterbury Hospital**, Canterbury
Telephone: 01227 766877 extension 722-4216 or 722-6810
- **Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother (QEQM) Hospital**, Margate
Telephone: 01843 225544 extension 725-3625 or 725-4234
- **William Harvey Hospital**, Ashford
Telephone: 01233 633331 extension 723-8202 or 723-8198

What do you think of this leaflet?

We welcome feedback, whether positive or negative, as it helps us to improve our care and services.

If you would like to give us feedback about this leaflet, please fill in our short online survey. Either scan the QR code below, or use the web link. We do not record your personal information, unless you provide contact details and would like to talk to us some more.

Giving feedback about this leaflet



<https://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/MDOBU4/>

If you would rather talk to someone instead of filling in a survey, please call the Patient Voice Team.

- **Patient Voice Team**
Telephone: 01227 868605
Email (ekhuft.patientvoice@nhs.net)

This leaflet has been produced with and for patients.

Please let us know:

- If you have any accessibility needs; this includes needing a hearing loop or wanting someone to come with you to your appointment.
- If you need an interpreter.
- If you need this information in another format (such as Braille, audio, large print or Easy Read).

You can let us know this by:

- Visiting the Trust web site (<https://www.ekhuft.nhs.uk/ais>).
- Calling the number at the top of your appointment letter.
- Adding this information to the Patient Portal (<https://pp.ekhuft.nhs.uk/login>).
- Telling a member of staff at your next appointment.

Any complaints, comments, concerns or compliments, please speak to a member of your healthcare team. Or contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service on 01227 783145 or email (ekh-tr.pals@nhs.net).

Patients should not bring large sums of money or valuables into hospital. Please note that East Kent Hospitals accepts no responsibility for the loss or damage to personal property, unless the property has been handed into Trust staff for safe-keeping.

Further patient information leaflets are available via the East Kent Hospitals' web site (<https://www.ekhuft.nhs.uk/patient-information>).

Reference number: EKH788

First published:
September 2010

Last reviewed:
September 2025

Next review date:
May 2028

Copyright © East Kent Hospitals University NHS Foundation Trust.