



# HENLEY-IN-ARDEN SCHOOL

*Achieving Excellence Together*

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Dear Parent

This letter is to advise you of the diarrhoea and vomiting illness which is present in the community at this time of the year and what you can do to reduce the spread of the infection.

Norovirus is commonly known as Winter Vomiting Disease and occurs commonly in the community and in schools and nurseries in particular at this time of the year

## **What are the symptoms?**

- Diarrhoea and vomiting usually lasting 1 -2 days

## **What should you do if your child is unwell?**

- Make sure they get lots of rest.
- Ensure they drink plenty of fluids, taking sips rather than gulps to avoid vomiting.
- Give infant Paracetamol or Ibuprofen, according to product instructions, to help keep their temperature down.
- If your child is unusually sleepy, won't take fluids or has other symptoms, such as blood in their diarrhoea, an unusual rash, headache, neck stiffness or difficulty breathing, ring NHS Direct (0845 4647), contact your GP or take your child to hospital.
- If you have not already done so, please ring the school and let them know that your child is ill and what symptoms they have.
- There is no need to keep your child off school once they are feeling well enough to return. However, if your child has been suffering from diarrhoea and vomiting please keep them at home until they have been free of diarrhoea and/or vomiting for 48 hours.

## **How can you prevent the spread of these infections?**

Hand washing is one of the most important ways to prevent the spread of both of these infections. This applies to the child who is ill and the person looking after them. Hands should always be washed, using liquid soap if possible:

- Before and after caring for your child.
- After using the toilet.
- Before eating or handling food.





- After cleaning up a mess (vomit, faeces or urine).

Other ways of preventing the spread of infection are to:

- Keep a separate towel for family members who have symptoms.
- Dispose promptly of used tissues and other items that your child may have coughed or sneezed on.
- Wash soiled clothing, bed linen and towels in a washing machine.
- Use the hottest wash for that fabric.
- Clean baths and washbasins thoroughly and disinfect after use.
- If cleaning up diarrhoea or vomit, wash the surface with hot soapy water and disinfect before allowing to dry. If using bleach remember that it can remove the colour from fabrics and can burn the skin.
- Keep your child away from other children and people that are particularly vulnerable, e.g. the elderly and those with chronic illnesses.

You may find the “frequently asked questions” on the following pages useful.

Yours sincerely,

Mr S Jefferies



## **Norovirus -frequently asked questions**

### **What are noroviruses?**

Noroviruses are a group of viruses that are the most common cause of gastroenteritis (stomach bugs) in England and Wales. In the past, noroviruses have also been called 'winter vomiting viruses', 'small round structured viruses' or 'Norwalk-like viruses'.

### **How does norovirus spread?**

The virus is easily transmitted from one person to another. It can be transmitted by contact with an infected person; by consuming contaminated food or water or by contact with contaminated surfaces or objects.

### **What are the symptoms?**

The symptoms of norovirus infection will begin around 12 to 48 hours after becoming infected. The illness is self-limiting and the symptoms will last for 12 to 60 hours. They will start with the sudden onset of nausea followed by projectile vomiting and watery diarrhoea. Some people may have a raised temperature, headaches and aching limbs. Most people make a full recovery within 1 -2 days, however some people (usually the very young or elderly) may become very dehydrated and require hospital treatment.

### **Why does Norovirus often cause outbreaks?**

Norovirus often causes outbreaks because it is easily spread from one person to another and the virus is able to survive in the environment for many days. Because there are many different strains of norovirus, and immunity is short-lived, outbreaks tend to affect more than 50% of susceptible people. Outbreaks usually tend to affect people who are in semi-closed environments such as hospitals, nursing homes, schools and on cruise ships.

### **How can these outbreaks be stopped?**

Outbreaks can be difficult to control and long-lasting because norovirus is easily transmitted from one person to another and the virus can survive in the environment. The most effective way to respond to an outbreak is to disinfect contaminated areas, to institute good hygiene measures including hand-washing and to provide advice on food handling. Those who have been infected should be isolated for up to 48 hours after their symptoms have ceased.

### **How is norovirus treated?**

There is no specific treatment for norovirus apart from letting the illness run its course. It is important to drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration.



### **If I'm suffering from norovirus, how can I prevent others from becoming infected?**

Good hygiene is important in preventing others from becoming infected –this includes thorough hand washing before and after contact. Food preparation should also be avoided until 48 hours after the symptoms have subsided.

### **Who is at risk of getting norovirus?**

There is no one specific group who are at risk of contracting norovirus –it affects people of all ages. The very young and elderly should take extra care if infected, as dehydration is more common in these age groups. Outbreaks of norovirus are reported frequently in semi-closed institutions such as hospitals, schools, residential and nursing homes and hotels. Anywhere that large numbers of people congregate for periods of several days provides an ideal environment for the spread of the disease. Healthcare settings tend to be particularly affected by outbreaks of norovirus. A recent study done by the Health Protection Agency shows that outbreaks are shortened when control measures at healthcare settings are implemented quickly, such as closing wards to new admissions within four days of the beginning of the outbreak and implementing strict hygiene measures.

### **How common is norovirus?**

Norovirus is not a notifiable disease so reporting is done on a voluntary basis. The Health Protection Agency only receives reports of outbreaks and we see anywhere between 130 and 250 outbreaks each year. It is estimated that norovirus affects between 600,000 and a million people in the UK each year.

### **Are there any long-term effects?**

No, there are no long-term effects from norovirus.

### **What can be done to prevent infection?**

It is impossible to prevent infection; however, taking good hygiene measures (such as frequent hand washing) around someone who is infected is important. Certain measures can be taken in the event of an outbreak, including the implementation of basic hygiene and food handling measures and prompt disinfection of contaminated areas, and the isolation of those infected for 48 hours after their symptoms have ceased.