



Oxford Health
NHS Foundation Trust



Infection Prevention and Control

Diarrhoea and Vomiting

Information for patients and visitors

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What is gastroenteritis?

Gastroenteritis is an illness that causes diarrhoea and/or sickness, usually caused by norovirus and is more common in the wintertime.

People with Norovirus are usually only unwell for a couple of days. Some people may only feel sick while others get diarrhoea and sickness.

How is it spread?

Viral gastroenteritis spreads through:

- ✓ contact with an infected person
- ✓ consuming food or water contaminated with particles of the virus
- ✓ contact with surfaces or objects contaminated with particles of the virus
- ✓ swallowing the virus in the air after someone has had projectile vomiting

Good hand washing with soap and water is important to minimise the spread of the virus.

Environmental cleaning is also very important.

How is the diagnosis made?

Initial diagnosis can be on the symptoms and your clinical history (e.g. having taken antibiotics).

Such a preliminary diagnosis can initiate increased levels of infection control precautions, such as moving you to a single room, to prevent spread.

This can be followed up with stool (faeces) samples.

Will I need single room?

It may be necessary to care for you in a single room whilst you are in hospital.

However, if there is an outbreak on a ward due to the rapid spread of this illness, it may be difficult to place all affected patients into single rooms.

If this happens you may be cared for on the ward together with other affected patients. The people caring for you will explain what is involved.

How will I be treated?

There is no specific treatment for gastroenteritis, apart from letting the illness run its course.

You don't usually need treatment unless your symptoms don't improve or there's a risk of a more serious problem.

What can I do to speed up my recovery?

- ✔ Drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration.
- ✔ If you feel like eating, eat foods that are easy to digest.
- ✔ Symptoms usually last for 12 to 60 hours but can sometimes last longer. Most people make a full recovery within one to two days. However, some people may become dehydrated and need further treatment.

How can I help stop the spreading?

- ✔ If you develop diarrhoea or sickness please let the nurses know straight away.
- ✔ It is very important to keep your hands clean. You should wash your hands with water and soap after you go to the toilet.

- ✔ Clean your hands before you eat.
- ✔ If you have fruit or other food with you it is advisable to keep it covered in a sealed container inside your locker and not to share it with others.

Remember it's OK to ask!

If you are concerned about hygiene, don't be afraid to ask the doctor or nurse treating you if they have cleaned their hands.

Remember it's OK to ask!

What precautions should visitors take?

- ✔ If you have experienced diarrhoea or sickness in the last 48 hours, please do not visit a hospital until you have been well for at least 2 days.
- ✔ Washing hands with soap and water is very important to prevent the spread of the illness. Alcohol hand rub is not effective against this virus.
- ✔ Clean your hands when you arrive at the ward and before you leave the ward.
- ✔ If you are going to help wash or care for your relative while they have diarrhoea and sickness please put on gloves and aprons.
- ✔ Whenever possible do not help other patients, please ask a nurse to help.
- ✔ It is not advisable to visit with young children so please check with the nurses before bringing children or babies to visit.

What happens when I stop having symptoms?

Once your diarrhoea or vomiting has stopped, it means the infection is settling.

If your bowels have returned to normal it may be possible to move you out of a single room. The staff looking after you will let you know when this is possible.

Will it delay my discharge from hospital?

If you are well enough to leave hospital you may be discharged home.

The doctors may want to make sure that your diarrhoea is settling and that you are able to eat and drink normally.

It is important that you talk to the nurses or doctor if you are worried.

If you are waiting to be transferred to another hospital the transfer may be delayed until your symptoms have settled.

What happens if I have diarrhoea again?

Sometimes the diarrhoea can start again. This may be after you have gone home, or while you are still in hospital.

If you are still in hospital it is important to tell a doctor or nurse if your diarrhoea starts up again. You may be asked to provide a sample by the nurses or doctors.

If you develop diarrhoea or sickness after you go home, it is important that you drink small but frequent drinks to make sure you do not get dehydrated.

This will help you avoid being unnecessarily readmitted to hospital.

You may be asked to provide a sample by your GP if you are at home.

If your symptoms do not settle or you are feeling particularly unwell you may need to contact NHS 111 (telephone 111) or your GP for further advice.

Infection prevention and control is everyone's responsibility. Patients and visitors all have an important

role to play in preventing the spread of healthcare associated infections.

Thank you for taking the time to read this leaflet. We hope that you have found it useful. If you would like more information, please ask the nurse caring for you or the clinical lead.

If you require further advice or information, please contact the hospital's Infection Prevention and Control Team or a member of the clinical area (ward/outpatient area).

Further information can be found at:

Diarrhoea and vomiting - NHS (www.nhs.uk)

Accessibility

Patient information leaflets are available on our website:
www.oxfordhealth.nhs.uk/leaflets

Get in touch

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Feedback

Our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) provides advice and support to patients, families, and carers, helping to resolve any problems, concerns, or complaints you may have.

Phone 0800 328 7971

Email PALS@oxfordhealth.nhs.uk

Become a member of our foundation trust: www.ohftnhs.uk/membership

Support Oxford Health Charity, making a difference to patients, their families and staff who care for them: www.oxfordhealth.charity