



Norovirus and Other Viral Gastroenteritis Outbreak Prevention and Control Guidelines for Congregate Settings

Noroviruses are a group of viruses that cause stomach illness. Stomach illness is sometimes called “gastroenteritis” or “stomach flu,” even though noroviruses and other viruses that cause gastroenteritis are not related to the flu (influenza). Viral gastroenteritis symptoms usually start one to two days after being exposed to the virus. Common symptoms include vomiting and diarrhea.

Viral gastroenteritis, including norovirus, is very contagious, especially in congregate settings, such as long-term care facilities, child care settings, shelters and schools. Norovirus and other viruses that cause gastroenteritis are spread when people have direct contact with someone who is sick, eat contaminated food or drink, or touch contaminated surfaces and then touch their mouth or eat without washing their hands first. Read the following guidelines to prevent cases and reduce transmission of norovirus and other viral gastroenteritis during outbreaks in your facility.

General Recommendations

- Encourage frequent handwashing with soap and warm running water for at least 20 seconds, especially after using the toilet; helping others use the toilet or changing diapers; before eating, preparing or handling food; or after being in contact with someone who has norovirus.
 - For more information on handwashing, visit [cdc.gov/clean-hands/about](https://www.cdc.gov/clean-hands/about).
- Provide access to soap and clean water.
- Display posters with instructions on how to wash hands properly in multiple languages.
 - To find handwashing posters for [children](#) and [adults](#) in multiple languages, visit [nyc.gov/health](https://www.nyc.gov/health) and search for [communicable diseases](#).
- Waterless, alcohol-based (at least 60% ethanol) hand sanitizers should **not** be used as a substitute for frequent handwashing, as they do not work well against norovirus.
- Do **not** allow staff members with norovirus or other viral gastroenteritis symptoms to work in the facility. If staff members experience symptoms while at work, they should be sent home immediately and should not return until at least 48 hours after their symptoms end.
- Frequently clean and disinfect high-touch surfaces, such as door handles, light switches, handrails, faucets and ice machines, following the [cleaning and disinfection guidance](#) on Page 2.
- Do **not** vacuum areas that are visibly soiled with fecal spillage or vomit — either steam-clean or use hot water and detergent.

Cleaning and Disinfection Guidance

- Create chlorine bleach concentrations in well-ventilated areas and wear personal protective equipment, including rubber or other nonporous boots, gloves and eye protection.
- Follow these guidelines when creating chlorine bleach concentrations:

Surfaces	Chlorine Bleach Concentration	Instructions
Stainless steel, food and mouth contact items (such as kitchenware and toys mouthed by children), and hard toys	1-250 dilution	Dissolve 1 tablespoon of bleach in 1 gallon of water.
Nonporous surfaces, tile floors, countertops, sinks, toilets, doorknobs and handrails	1-50 dilution	Dissolve 1/3 cup of bleach in 1 gallon of water.
Porous surfaces and wooden floors	1-10 dilution	Dissolve 1 2/3 cup of bleach in 1 gallon of water.
Carpets and upholstered fabrics visibly soiled with vomit or fecal spillage	Not applicable	Use hot water and detergent or steam-clean. Do not vacuum, as viruses can become airborne.

- Wear heavy-duty gloves (rather than simple latex or vinyl gloves) when cleaning.
- Leave bleach solutions on surfaces for 10 to 20 minutes, then rinse with clean water.
- Replace open bottles of concentrated chlorine bleach after 30 days, as they will begin to lose their effectiveness. For the best results, prepare solutions daily.
- As an alternative to bleach, use an Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-approved disinfectant effective against norovirus (for a list, visit bit.ly/epa-list-g-products).

Recommendations for Health Care and Assisted Living Facilities During an Outbreak

- Have patients and residents who have norovirus or other viral gastroenteritis symptoms isolate in their rooms until 48 hours after their symptoms end, if possible.
- Provide personal protective equipment for staff members and reinforce that they should properly wear gowns and gloves when caring for patients and residents, remove gowns and gloves before exiting patients' or residents' rooms, and wash their hands immediately after.
- Do **not** allow staff members to care for (or "float" between) patients or residents who have norovirus or other viral gastroenteritis symptoms and patients or residents who do not have norovirus or other viral gastroenteritis symptoms. During an outbreak, staff members should be assigned to care only for patients or residents who have symptoms **or** patients or residents who do not have symptoms (not both groups) to prevent transmission.
- Exclude nonessential personnel from all units with patients or residents who have norovirus or other viral gastroenteritis symptoms.

- Pause new admissions into the facility until the outbreak has ended, if possible (at least 48 hours after the last person’s norovirus symptoms have ended).
- Do **not** allow patients or residents from units where there is an outbreak to enter or transfer to unaffected units until the outbreak has ended, unless doing so is medically urgent.
- Pause group activities (such as communal dining, including self-service bars) until the outbreak has ended.
- Limit visitation until the outbreak has ended.
- Store and launder contaminated, soiled linens separately from uncontaminated, unsoiled linens. Do not shake soiled linens and laundry, as doing so can spread germs and pose a transmission risk. Wash linens with detergent and hot water using the maximum wash cycle, then machine-dry them using the highest heat setting.
- Use disposable cleaning cloths, including a new one for every room or area.

Recommendations for Child Care Settings

- Exclude children with norovirus or other viral gastroenteritis symptoms until symptoms have ended.
- Clean and disinfect toys daily.
 - For more information on how to handle and clean children’s toys, visit on.nyc.gov/toy-cleaning-poster or on.nyc.gov/toy-cleaning-summer-camps.
- Use disposable materials, such as shelf paper, wax paper, scrap computer paper or cut-up paper bags, to cover the pads on diaper-changing surfaces. These materials should be discarded after every diaper change.
- Clean diaper-changing surfaces after every diaper change by washing with detergent and hot water, then rinsing with clean water.
- Wash children’s hands after changing their diaper.
 - For more information on how to safely change diapers in child care settings, visit cdc.gov/hygiene/pdf/diapering-childcare-508.pdf.
- Display posters with instructions on how to safely change diapers in multiple languages.
 - To find posters for [healthy and safe diaper changing for child care providers](#) in multiple languages, visit nyc.gov/health and search for [group child care centers](#).

Recommendations for Shelters and Other Congregate Settings During an Outbreak

The following recommendations might not be easy to implement in all residential congregate settings. If needed, call the NYC Health Department’s Provider Access Line at 866-692-3641 to develop an outbreak response plan and receive guidance on managing outbreaks of diarrheal infections tailored to your setting:

- Have all residents who have norovirus or other viral gastroenteritis symptoms isolate in a separate room or section of the residence (preferably with its own bathroom facilities)

until 48 hours after the last person's symptoms have stopped. Off-site isolation is not required or needed.

- If your setting has communal bathrooms:
 - Have residents who have norovirus or other viral gastroenteritis symptoms and residents who do not have norovirus or other viral gastroenteritis symptoms use separate bathrooms, if possible. Use signage to designate some toilets for use by residents who have symptoms only.
 - Increase how often bathrooms are cleaned.
- Serve food to people who have norovirus or other viral gastroenteritis symptoms separately from people who do not have norovirus or other viral gastroenteritis symptoms. Consider pausing communal dining.
- Provide residents with plastic bags (such as small bathroom trash can liners) to contain vomit and dispose of adult and children diapers.

Recommendations for Food Establishments and Food Service Areas

- Clean equipment, counters, utensils, linens, and unwrapped single-service and single-use articles.
- Run dishwashers at a minimum of 170 degrees Fahrenheit (76.7 degrees Celsius). For dishwashers that sanitize using a dishwasher solution, use the appropriate litmus kit to make sure you get an accurate reading.
- Do **not** enter food service areas with items soiled with vomit or fecal spillage.
- Remind staff members to wash their hands with soap and warm running water for at least 20 seconds after using the restroom, sneezing and coughing as well as before and after preparing food. Staff members should dry their hands with single-service paper towels or an air dryer.
- Remind staff members who clear tables or handle used utensils, cups or dishes to regularly wash their hands, especially before eating or handling food or cleaning utensils.
- Remind staff members to wear gloves before handling ready-to-eat food and eating utensils.
- Encourage staff members to wear a mask when cleaning.
- During an outbreak, if communal dining (including self-service bars) is paused, serve food individually in to-go containers.

For more information, visit nyc.gov/health and search for noroviruses or cdc.gov/norovirus/prevention/index.html.