

# Viral gastroenteritis (including norovirus)

## Infection Control Team

### Patient Information Leaflet

#### What is viral gastroenteritis?

It is an inflammation of the stomach and intestines and is often caused by a virus known as the norovirus. It is a common infection particularly in the winter months. It can cause outbreaks in hospitals, schools and in nursing and residential homes.

#### How long does it last?

It usually lasts two to three days although it can last longer.

#### What is the treatment?

Treatment is not usually necessary as the body gets rid of the virus itself through vomiting (being sick) and diarrhoea.

If you are able to drink fluids, it is important to do so in order to replace the fluids you have lost.

#### How does it spread?

Vomiting causes virus particles to spread. You can catch it by touching contaminated surfaces and objects and then touching your nose or mouth. You can also catch it if you eat food prepared by an infected person who has not washed their hands.

If you catch the virus, you may not develop symptoms for 15 to 48 hours. You will be infectious until 48 hours after you were last sick or had diarrhoea.

## **How can I prevent it?**

The best ways to prevent yourself from getting the virus are to:

- Wash your hands before you eat or drink anything.
- Wash your hands after using the toilet (ward staff can give cleansing wipes to any patients who cannot use the washbasin).
- If you are visiting patients, wash your hands before leaving the ward using soap and water and then use the alcohol gel provided.

## **What should I do with dirty washing?**

Laundry (such as clothes, bedding or towels) that might be contaminated with the virus should be washed at the hottest temperature the items will allow. Tumble drying (where appropriate) can help to kill most bugs.

You will either be given the laundry in a plastic bag and offered some gloves to handle it with or it may be given to you in a special bag that can go directly into the washing machine (instructions will be included).

Always wash your hands after handling this laundry.

## **What is the hospital doing about it?**

Staff have to follow a number of infection control precautions designed to help prevent the spread of infection. These include wearing gloves and aprons and regular hand washing.

Extra cleaning is carried out in the hospital in order to reduce the amount of virus particles in the environment.

Visiting will be restricted in any wards that are affected by the virus to prevent the spread to other areas. Information on this will be displayed at the entrance to wards. You are advised to telephone the ward to check on visiting times.

If you have any questions, or if there is anything you do not understand about this leaflet, please contact:

Infection Control Team on 01384 244174 (8.30am to 5pm, Monday to Friday)

Russells Hall Hospital switchboard number: 01384 456111

**This leaflet can be downloaded or printed from:**

<http://dgft.nhs.uk/about-us/quality/infection-control/patient-information-leaflets/>

If you have any feedback on this patient information leaflet, please email [dgft.patient.information@nhs.net](mailto:dgft.patient.information@nhs.net)

**This leaflet can be made available in large print, audio version and in other languages, please call 0800 073 0510.**

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