



Information about Viral Gastrointestinal Infections

Why Have You Been Given This Leaflet?

Your local council has a responsibility to investigate food poisoning and certain incidents of infectious disease. An officer from your local council's Environmental Health Department is contacting you to try and find out where your infection may have come from and to give advice on preventing further spread to others.

NHS Tayside Health Protection Team has notified your local Environmental Health Department that you or one of your household is suffering from viral gastrointestinal infections. They are often the first to tell you what type of infection you have rather than your General Practitioner (GP).

The aim of this leaflet is to give you information and to answer some of the most frequently asked questions about viral gastrointestinal infections. **Please take time to read this leaflet.**

What are viral gastrointestinal infections?

Viral gastroenteritis is caused by a number of viruses (germs). The most common are norovirus also known as winter vomiting disease and rotavirus. It is a very common illness causing vomiting and diarrhoea.

Where does it come from?

The virus is found in the faeces (stools), vomit, and nose and throat secretions of infected people. People are thought to be the only source of this infection. It can be passed from person to person and/or their symptoms can contaminate the environment.

How can you get a viral gastroenteritis infection?

You can be become infected in a number of ways

- Contact with other people who have the illness, who have not washed their hands after using the toilet or coughing and sneezing
- Breathing in the virus from the air after e.g. an infected person sneezing, coughing or having a vomiting or diarrhoeal episode
- Eating food prepared by someone who has symptoms
- Contact with contaminated environments or articles e.g. soiled clothing, furniture or floor coverings, and unclean toilets and sinks

What are the usual symptoms?

The main symptoms are

- Vomiting
- Diarrhoea
- Fever
- Stomach cramp and pains
- Headache
- Nausea and loss of appetite – babies may refuse feeds
- Lack of energy and tiredness.

When do the symptoms start?

The symptoms usually start between 4 hours and 4 days from having had contact with the virus but can be as long as 10 days. HPT manual states symptom onset 15-48 hours

How long will the symptoms last?

The majority of people recover within 2 to 3 days. In children the illness can last up to 4 to 6 days.

How do you treat viral gastrointestinal infections?

The infection will usually settle without any treatment.

It is important to drink fluids to replace the water lost through having diarrhoea and vomiting. This applies particularly for babies, children and the elderly.

If a young child has symptoms or if your symptoms continue or are particularly severe, consult your GP or seek medical advice from NHS 24.

Do I need to stay off nursery, school, work or other activities?

Yes, it is important to stay at home until you have had no vomiting or diarrhoea for 2 days.

What should I do if I have symptoms again?

If your symptoms return or become more severe (e.g. blood in diarrhoea) you should see a GP or seek medical advice from NHS 24.

What should I do if I know of others with similar symptoms?

If a young child develops symptoms or if an adult has symptoms which are severe or last for more than 2 days they should consult their GP or seek medical advice from NHS 24.

They should, if possible, submit a stool sample via their GP.

You should tell the officer of the Environmental Health Department the details of the others you know to be ill. This information can help in identifying sources of infection.

How can you avoid getting or passing to others a viral gastrointestinal infection?

Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and warm water

- Before preparing, handling or eating foods
- After handling raw food especially meat or poultry
- As soon as possible after working, feeding, grooming or playing with pets and other animals
- You should pay special attention to hygiene during farm visits, washing hands after any contact with animals, and eating only in designated areas
- After going to the toilet or changing a child's nappy
- By ensuring young children wash their hands.

Handle food and drink safely

- Thoroughly cook meat and poultry so that they are cooked all the way through, and no blood runs from them
- Thaw frozen food properly before cooking
- Always reheat food thoroughly
- Do not use the same knives, chopping boards and equipment for preparing raw foods and cooked or ready to eat foods
- Thoroughly clean knives, chopping boards and equipment used for preparing raw foods with hot water and detergent after each use
- Never put cooked food back on an unwashed plate previously used for uncooked meat
- Do not wash raw poultry because this will splash germs around
- Store cooked or ready to eat food in the fridge separately from raw meats. Raw foods should not be stored above or beside cooked or ready to eat food.
- Store uncooked meat on the bottom of the fridge to avoid dripping raw meat juices onto other food
- Wash all fruit, salads and vegetables that are to be eaten raw
- Do not drink untreated water or unpasteurised milk
- Do not use ice or drinking water in countries where the water supply might be unsafe
- Do not buy ready to eat foods from shops where you believe food hygiene standards are poor Report such places to your local Environmental Health Department
- **Do not** prepare food for others until your diarrhoea and vomiting symptoms have been stopped for 48 hours.

Household Measures

Whilst you have symptoms you need to be scrupulously clean around your home.

- Make sure all members of your household wash their hands thoroughly with soap and hot water after going to the toilet and after handling soiled clothing or bedding
- Make sure that everyone has their own towel and that they do not use anybody else's
- Wash all soiled clothes, bedding and towels in the washing machine on the hottest cycle that the manufacturer would recommend
- Clean toilet seats, toilet bowls, flush handles, taps and wash hand basins after use with detergent and hot water, followed by a household disinfectant.

Water Safety

- Do not use swimming pools (including hot tubs and paddling pools, etc.) if you have diarrhoea. You should wait until you have had no symptoms for 2 days
- Do not swim in water that may be contaminated
- Do not drink untreated water and avoid swallowing water when in lakes and swimming pools
- If your water supply is from a private water source please discuss this with the Environmental Health Department.

Where can you get further advice?

If you would like any further advice about *Shigella* infection or food hygiene, please contact your local Environmental Health Department. The local offices are listed below

Angus Council

Communities Department

Dewar House

12 Hill Terrace

Arbroath

DD11 1AH

Website: www.angus.gov.uk

Email: envhealth@angus.gov.uk



Tele: 01241 435600

Dundee City Council

Environmental Protection Division

Environment Department

3 City Square

Dundee

DD1 3BA

Website: www.dundee.gov.uk

Email: food.safety@dundee.gov.uk



Tele: 01382 433710

Perth & Kinross Council

Environmental and Consumer Services

Pullar House

35 Kinnoull Street

Perth

PH1 5GD

Website: www.pkc.gov.uk

Email: enquiries@pkc.gov.uk



Tele: 01738 476476

Other useful sources of information

The National Hand Washing Campaign

www.washyourhandsofthem.com

The Food Standards Agency

www.food.gov.uk

Travel and Immunisation Advice

www.fitfortravel.com

NHS 24

Tele: 111 - www.nhs24.com

NHS Tayside

Health Protection Team

Directorate of Public Health

Kings Cross

Cleington Road

Dundee

DD3 8EA

Website: www.taysidepublichealth.com



Tele: 01382 596976 or 596987

Further copies of this information are available or can be downloaded from the above NHS and local council. This information can be made available in Urdu, Chinese, Hindi, Arabic, large print, Braille or audio tape. Information in other languages and formats can be made available on request. Contact NHS Tayside Communications Department on 01382 424138.

Date of review: June 2014

Date of next review: June 2016