

# Infectious Diarrhoea and Vomiting (Gastroenteritis)



This may be due to a number of causes including:

<b>Bacteria</b>	Campylobacter Salmonella Shigella (bacillary dysentery) E. coli 0157
<b>Viruses</b>	Rotavirus Small round structured viruses (e.g. Norwalk or Winter Vomiting Disease)
<b>Parasites</b>	Cryptosporidium Giardia

## Is it Infectious?

Yes. Diarrhoea and vomiting can have many different causes (including medical conditions, side effects of medications, excessive alcohol etc.) but the cause should be assumed to be an infection until known otherwise. An infection in the gut causing diarrhoea and vomiting (**gastroenteritis**) can be easily passed to others. Anyone with gastroenteritis should be regarded as very infectious and must be kept away from school until the diarrhoea and vomiting has stopped and they have been passing normal stools for at least 48 hours. If the cause is identified as anything other than Norovirus, the school should contact the health protection team for further advice regarding any further action and exclusion.

## What is Norovirus?

Norovirus is the most common cause of infectious diarrhoea and vomiting in the UK and is extremely infectious. Each year, it is estimated that between 600,000 and 1 million people in the UK catch norovirus. The illness is sometimes called the "winter vomiting bug" because it is more common in winter however it is possible to catch the virus at any time of the year.

There are at least 25 different strains of noroviruses known to affect humans. There is no specific treatment for norovirus so symptoms should be treated as needed. Norovirus symptoms usually do not last more than a couple of days but individuals can feel extremely unwell during this period.

### If symptoms start at school:

- Isolate away from other students
- Ensure that a dedicated toilet is nearby and should only be used by symptomatic students / staff
- All lever/light switches, handles and other 'high contact' items must be cleaned regularly with detergent and water and then disinfected with a hypochlorite solution. Bathrooms should also be thoroughly cleaned as above.
- Send any symptomatic individuals home as soon as possible.
- Siblings who are asymptomatic can remain in school
- Contact the health protection team for further advice and guidance

### What are the symptoms?

- Vomiting
- Diarrhoea and/or abdominal pain
- Fever
- Headache

The symptoms may occur singly or in combination. Dependant on the cause, the illness usually lasts only a short time and may require no specific treatment, however parents should be encouraged to seek medical advice should blood be present in the faeces/diarrhoea, if symptoms persist or if a child appears particularly unwell.

### How can spread be prevented?

Spread occurs when the organism enters the gut by the mouth or when contaminated hands or objects are put in the mouth (including contaminated food or drink). Spread can also occur after an affected individual vomits.

- Strict attention to personal hygiene is important to reduce the spread of the disease. Good hand hygiene after going to the toilet, changing an affected nappy and before eating food is essential.
- Hands should be washed with running water and liquid soap then dried with paper towels. Hand sanitiser (e.g. alcohol gel) can be used in addition to hand washing but should not replace it in this situation.
- Designated bathroom facilities should be identified for exclusive use of any symptomatic individuals.
- Toilets should be cleaned after use with a hypochlorite solution.
- Additional environmental cleaning should be implemented which includes 'high contact' areas such as door handles, flush handle, light switches and under the rim of the toilet seat. Consideration must be given to the age of the children affected (small children will hold onto a different parts of the toilet and doors than an adult)
- Pets or farm animals may be a source (see guidelines on **Farm and Country Visits**).
- Ensure hands are washed after handling animals, animal feed or bedding, taking off outdoor footwear, playing in the garden or in the playground.





### What is an outbreak?

An outbreak is defined as two or more linked cases with similar symptoms over and above that which would normally be expected. The school should contact the health protection team as soon as they suspect an outbreak to discuss the situation, obtain an integrated care pathway and discuss any actions required.

A checklist for managing diarrhoea and vomiting outbreaks can be found in appendix three of the **Health protection in schools and other childcare facilities** guidance.

### The health protection team will give advice on:

- Infection prevention and control
- Cleaning /disinfection
- Exclusion
- Obtaining samples of faeces / vomit from affected students and staff

An outbreak committee may be convened if necessary with representation from school staff to advise on the investigation and control of illness.

### Boarding Schools

Boarding schools must ensure that symptomatic students are sent home or go to stay with their guardians. Staying in the boarding houses may infect other students and staff. The health protection team can provide further advice and guidance..

Further infection control precautions will be addressed at the time of an incident. It is important that the school:

- Isolate symptomatic students until they can be sent home (potentially in the medical centre or cohort in a separate dormitory from other students))
- Identify a dedicated bathroom to be used only by those who are symptomatic
- Wash any soiled laundry or clothes separately on a wash that is stated by the wash label
- Ensure appropriate personal protective equipment such as gloves and aprons are worn when any personal care is given or cleaning is undertaken.
- Ensure good hand hygiene is undertaken
- Considers access to handwashing facilities near the dining room as hands should be cleaned before a meal. If handwashing facilities are not available, an alternative may be wall mounted hand gels at every entrance. This may have to be attended by staff members when introduced, but as a 'duty of care' it is important for this to become a part of partaking of a meal. The health protection team can provide advice if required.

More information on Gastroenteritis can be found in chapter nine of the **Health protection in schools and childcare facilities** guidance.