



Viral Gastroenteritis

What is Viral Gastroenteritis?

Viral gastroenteritis is an infection caused by viruses. Two common causes of gastroenteritis are *Norovirus* and *Rotavirus*. These viruses have been linked to outbreaks of gastrointestinal illness in residential communities, schools, institutions, and child care centers. Attendees of these types of facilities are especially vulnerable to outbreaks of such illness. While two rotavirus vaccines are currently licensed for use in infants in the United States, RotaTq (RV5) and Rotarix (RV1), to date there is no licensed Norovirus vaccine.

Norovirus is the most common cause of acute gastroenteritis in the United States. Once introduced in a specific location, both Norovirus and Rotavirus spread rapidly, and without proper cleaning and disinfecting, they can survive for weeks on surfaces such as desks, doorknobs, and toys. Affected people usually recover within 3-8 days for Rotavirus and 2-3 days for Norovirus. Severe illness requiring hospitalization is rare.

How are Norovirus and Rotavirus spread?

These viruses are spread primarily by touching the mouth with contaminated hands. In most facilities, they are spread when ill people contaminate their hands with stool or vomit-containing particles of the virus. Virus can also be spread by touching contaminated objects or surfaces, having skin-to-skin or hand-to-hand contact with an infected person or by breathing in airborne viruses after an ill person vomits. Norovirus and Rotavirus are very contagious because they are present in very high amounts in the stool and vomit of ill persons. It only takes a few particles of these viruses to cause illness in a susceptible person.

What are the signs and symptoms of Norovirus and Rotavirus infection?

- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Stomach cramps

How are Norovirus and Rotavirus controlled?

- ALL students, staff, volunteers, parents, and visitors should wash their hands with soap and water frequently and ALWAYS:
 - After using the toilet or assisting someone with toileting, including diaper changes
 - Before and after preparing food
 - Before and after caring for someone who is ill
 - After touching potentially contaminated objects, such as telephones, doorknobs, counter and table tops, arms or chairs, mats, toilets or training bowls, diaper changing tables and toys.
- Additionally, all persons should wear gloves when expecting contact with ANY body fluid such as vomit and stool, and assume all body fluids are contaminated.
- Wear a mask when cleaning, or in contact with, visibly soiled surfaces, objects, and ill people.
- Place soiled clothing and linen in a plastic bag before sending any items home.
- Wash soiled linen in hot water and dry at the hottest setting possible.

Use a diluted bleach solution for disinfecting commonly touched hard surfaces such as vinyl, ceramic tile, counter tops, sinks, toilets, door handles, and stair rails with 1/3 cup bleach to 1 gallon of water.

[Cleaning and Disinfecting with Bleach](#)

If an outbreak of Norovirus or Rotavirus is suspected, follow these steps:

- ➔ Contact the San Mateo County Communicable Disease Control (650) 573-2346 M-F, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., or (650) 363-4981 evenings, weekends and holidays.
- ➔ Contact your facility's licensing agency.
- ➔ Send ill students and staff members home.
- ➔ Request that ill students, staff members, volunteers, and family members stay home until they have been symptom-free for at least 48 hours. Encourage drinking of clear liquids to prevent dehydration.
- ➔ Limit visits and unnecessary field trips in and out of facility to the extent possible while the outbreak is ongoing.
- ➔ Minimize group and social activities, to the extent possible, while the outbreak is ongoing.
- ➔ Review proper hand washing techniques and post signage to encourage frequent hand washing.
- ➔ Increase routine cleaning and disinfecting and use a diluted bleach solution as advised above.

Following these recommendations as soon as possible can reduce the amount of time your facility experiences an outbreak of viral gastroenteritis.

For more information, please visit <https://www.smchealth.org/infectioncontrol>, or contact the San Mateo County Communicable Disease Control Program at (650) 573-2346 M-F 8 am - 5 pm, or call (650) 363-4981 evenings, weekends and holidays.