

Norwalk virus → Viral gastroenteritis → Cruise Ship Illness

Norwalk and Norwalk-like viruses are single-stranded RNA, nonenveloped viruses that cause acute gastroenteritis in humans. *Norovirus* is their official genus name (family name: *Caliciviridae*.) Noroviruses are the leading causes of foodborne disease in the United States. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, they are second only to the common cold in the number of people they make ill each year. They are also the most common cause of gastroenteritis on cruise ships, otherwise known as Cruise Ship Illness.

■ Definition

- Cruise Ship Illness results from an infection that causes inflammation of the stomach and small and large intestines.
- It often occurs in outbreaks.

■ Signs and symptoms

- Symptoms usually appear in 1 to 2 days after a person is infected.
- They include nausea, vomiting, watery diarrhea, stomach cramps, fever, and headache.
- Symptoms can last from 1 to 10 days although most infected individuals recover in 2 to 3 days without serious or long-term health effects.

■ Transmission

- The virus that causes Cruise Ship Illness is shed in large numbers in the stool and vomit of infected individuals, usually while they are ill.
- Individuals may continue to shed virus after that have recovered from the illness.
- Most commonly, people get the virus infection by swallowing food or water that has been contaminated with the stool from an infected person.
- It can also be spread through contact with contaminated surfaces and by contaminated hands through the fecal-oral route.
- The virus may also be spread from person to person.
- Individuals must remain isolated for 72 hours after they have recovered from the illness.
- Reinfection can occur.

■ Outbreaks

- Outbreaks are often linked to eating raw shellfish, especially oysters and clams, contaminated via stool from sick food handlers or from raw sewage dumped overboard by recreational and commercial boaters.
- Contaminated water, ice, eggs, salad ingredients, and ready-to-eat foods are also sources of infection.

■ Treatment

- No specific treatment is available.
- Individuals who are severely dehydrated might need rehydration therapy.

■ Prevention

- Wash hands rigorously with soap and warm water after toilet visits and before preparing or eating food.
- Cook all shellfish thoroughly before eating.
- Wash raw vegetables before eating.
- Dispose of sewage in a sanitary manner.