

Norovirus toolkit for long-term care facilities

About norovirus

Norovirus is a very contagious virus that causes diarrhea, vomiting, and stomach pain. Sick people shed the virus in their stool (poop) and vomit. This can contaminate food, surfaces, and objects. Norovirus spreads to other people when they eat or touch contaminated items and surfaces.

Norovirus spreads easily in long-term care facilities (LTCFs). During 2024, about 50% of all norovirus outbreaks in Utah occurred in LTCFs. Local health departments and the Utah Department of Health and Human Services are here to help your facility with gastrointestinal outbreaks. We will also document the outbreak to better understand disease burden and trends.



Prevent outbreaks

1. Hand hygiene

- a. Train staff on proper hand hygiene.
- b. Make sure staff and resident bathrooms are stocked with soap and paper towels.

2. Cleaning and sanitizing

- a. Check the labels on your cleaning products to make sure they are effective against norovirus. You can check with your chemical supplier or look at [EPA's List G: Registered Antimicrobial Products Effective Against Norovirus](#).
- b. Clean up vomiting or diarrheal incidents immediately. Do not use a vacuum.

3. Person movement

- a. If possible, do not move patients in or out of the facility while they are ill.
- b. People with vomiting or diarrhea should not visit the facility while ill.
- c. Staff and volunteers should stay home from work if ill with vomiting or diarrhea.

4. Quickly identify outbreaks

- a. Keep track of resident, staff, and volunteer illnesses.



Identify and report outbreaks

According to Utah state law [R386-702](#), all norovirus outbreaks need to be reported to public health within 24 hours. Here are some examples of when to report a suspect norovirus outbreak:

1. There are more gastrointestinal illnesses in your facility than normal.
2. There are multiple gastrointestinal illnesses in one wing or unit.
3. There are more staff calling in sick with gastrointestinal symptoms than usual.

You can report outbreaks by:

1. Calling your [local health department](#).
2. Calling the Utah Department of Health and Human Services epidemiology line (801-538-6191).
3. Emailing enterics@utah.gov.

When you report a suspected norovirus outbreak, a public health worker may ask you the following questions:

1. What date did the earliest illness start?
2. When did the other illnesses occur?
3. How many residents do you have in the facility?
4. How many residents have been ill?
5. How many staff do you have in the facility?
6. How many staff have been ill?
7. What symptoms did ill individuals have?
8. How long does the illness last?
9. Have the ill individuals been in one unit or wing, or spread across the facility?
10. Have any dietary or food staff been ill?

Public health workers will also answer your questions and provide guidance on how to control the outbreak.



Document the outbreak

1. If directed by your public health contact, fill out the **Illness Log** at the end of this toolkit to document illnesses among staff and residents.
2. Collect stool samples from 3 ill residents and/or staff to test for norovirus.
 - a. If you want to test for free through the Utah Public Health Laboratory, work with your public health contact.
 - b. If you want to test at a clinical laboratory, notify your public health contact of any results.
3. Send the completed **Illness Log** back to your public health contact between 1 and 2 weeks after the last illness.
 - a. This information is used to report to the [National Outbreak Reporting System \(NORS\)](#). This helps us understand disease burdens and trends. Your facility name is not reported.
4. Share any other important information (i.e. activities and events prior to the outbreak, menus, etc.) requested by your public health contact.



Control the outbreak

1. Residents

- a. Make sure sick residents stay in their rooms until at least 48 hours after symptoms end.
- b. Make sure sick residents do not share bathrooms with residents who are not sick. If your facility has shared bathrooms, consider using bedside commodes.
- c. Consider pausing new admissions until the outbreak has ended.
- d. Exclude actively ill residents from games and activities where touching common items occurs (checkers, cards, etc.).
- e. Encourage residents to wash their hands frequently. Hand sanitizer is not effective against norovirus.

2. Staff

- a. Make sure sick employees (including outside contractors such as home health agency staff) stay home until at least 48 hours after symptoms end.
- b. Wear a gown and gloves to enter a sick resident's room and throw them away before you leave the room.

- c. Encourage staff to wash their hands frequently. Hand sanitizer is not effective against norovirus.

3. Visitors

- a. Consider limiting visitors during the outbreak.
- b. Notify visitors of the outbreak so they understand the risk of illness.
- c. Post signs to promote visitor hand washing. Hand sanitizer is not effective against norovirus.

4. Cleaning

- a. Immediately clean all frequently touched surfaces and objects with soap and water, then rinse.
- b. After cleaning, sanitize all surfaces with a disinfectant that is effective against norovirus. You can use a 5-8% chlorine bleach solution or a product from [EPA's List G: Registered Antimicrobial Products Effective Against Norovirus](#).
- c. Continue to clean and sanitize daily until the outbreak is over (usually 1 to 2 weeks after the last illness).
- d. Clean up vomiting or diarrheal incidents immediately. Do not use a vacuum.
- e. Wash and dry laundry at the highest possible temperature.

5. Food service

- a. Make sure sick food handlers stay home until at least 48 hours after symptoms end.
- b. Clean and sanitize all kitchen and dining area surfaces (described above in "Cleaning").
- c. Discontinue all self-service food and drinks until the outbreak is over (usually 1 to 2 weeks after the last illness).
- d. Postpone or cancel common events such as birthdays, holidays, and special celebrations until the outbreak is over (usually 1 to 2 weeks after the last illness).



Resources

- [Utah DHHS norovirus information](#)
- [Norovirus fact sheet](#)
- [Norovirus employee exclusion guidelines](#)
- [Printable poster: What to do if you have a gastrointestinal outbreak in your facility \(English\)](#)
- [Printable poster: What to do if you have a gastrointestinal outbreak in your facility \(Spanish\)](#)
- [CDC Norovirus Prevention and Control Guidelines for Healthcare Settings](#)

This toolkit has been adapted for use from the Minnesota Department of Health.

Illness Log

Facility name: _____ Type of facility (e.g. nursing home, assisted living, etc.): _____
 Address: _____ City: _____ ZIP code: _____
 Contact name: _____ Phone number: _____ Email address: _____

Name	Resident or staff?	Floor/area (e.g. memory care, kitchen, etc.)	Age	Sex	Vomit	Diarrhea	Fever	Outcome	Onset date/time	Recovery date/time	Test results
	<input type="checkbox"/> Resident <input type="checkbox"/> Staff				<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N	<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N	<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N	<input type="checkbox"/> Hospitalized <input type="checkbox"/> Died <input type="checkbox"/> Neither	Date: _____ Time: _____	Date: _____ Time: _____	
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