

NORWALK-LIKE VIRUSES (NLV)

Questions and Answers

What is Norwalk-like virus?

Norwalk-like viruses are a group of viruses that cause stomach and intestinal illness, often occurring in outbreaks. These viruses are common world-wide, and can affect any age group. Norwalk virus is a specific virus in this group, and was named for an outbreak in an elementary school in Norwalk, Ohio in 1968.

How do people get Norwalk-like virus illness?

These viruses are commonly spread by the fecal-oral route, through eating food or drinking water contaminated with fecal material that contains the virus. The virus can then spread from one person to another when a person touches hard surfaces contaminated with stool or vomitus from an infected person, and then puts their hands in their mouth without washing them. It is possible to get NLV more than once, since immunity is only short.

What are the symptoms of NLV infection?

NLV infection is usually a mild to moderate illness that gets better on its own. It comes on suddenly, with nausea and/or vomiting and/or watery diarrhea being the most common symptoms. Symptoms may also include abdominal cramps, headache, mild fever, chills and muscle pains. Vomiting may be more common in children, while adults tend to have more diarrhea.

How long does this infection last?

The time between exposure to the virus and the start of symptoms is usually about 24-48 hours (incubation period). The period of illness usually lasts from 24-48 hours, but can occasionally last longer. A person may spread this virus to others for 48 hours or more after the last episode of vomiting or diarrhea. That is why it is important to stay home from work or school or visiting others until 48 hours after symptoms have stopped.

How is NLV infection treated?

There is no specific treatment for NLV infection – it just takes time to run its course. To prevent dehydration, ill persons should drink clear fluids. If symptoms are not improving after 48-72 hours, or if you are concerned about severe illness, contact your family physician or call the Calgary Health Region at 943-LINK.

What can be done to prevent NLV infection?

Good personal hygiene should be practiced at all times. Handwashing after using the toilet or changing diapers, and before preparing or eating food is very important. Waterless alcohol hand wash, available at some drug or other stores, can be used if hands are not visibly dirty. If they are, soap and water is best.

If someone is ill with NLV infection, they should not return to day care, school or work, or handle food to be eaten by others until at least 48 hours after their last episode of vomiting or diarrhea. If someone is ill at home, bathroom fixtures and other hard surfaces should be cleaned and then disinfected with a household bleach solution (mixed 1 part bleach to 9 parts of water) at least daily. Caution should be used when using bleach, and care should be taken to keep it away from children. Towels and face cloths should not be shared, and children should be bathed separately.