

# Norovirus

Norovirus, also known as the “stomach flu or bug,” used to be known as the “Winter Vomiting Disease.” It has been in the news recently, and is the confirmed virus that sickened at least 162 passengers and 11 crew members on board Princess Cruises' Caribbean Princess, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC.) Norovirus is also believed to be the leading pathogen for foodborne illness in the United States. It is suspected to have caused almost 700 people to experience gastrointestinal illness on board the cruise ship Royal Caribbean's Explorer of the Seas. Norovirus infection typically presents with an acute onset and generally includes some combination of nausea and vomiting, along with a watery, non-bloody diarrhea, and abdominal cramps and discomfort. A low-grade fever occasionally occurs, and vomiting is more common in children. The most common complication of this illness is dehydration, especially among the young and the elderly. Symptoms generally last 24-48 hours, and are followed by complete recovery.

The Health Department would like you to know that noroviruses are highly contagious. Transmission of noroviruses is primarily by person-to-person spread via the fecal-oral route or through contaminated food or water. Once a person is exposed to norovirus, illness can occur within 24-48 hours. Some personal preventative measures people can take include always washing hands thoroughly for at least 15-20 seconds with soap and warm water before eating or preparing food, after using the toilet, and after changing diapers. A child's hands should also be washed after a diaper change. One should dispose of feces and vomitus in a sanitary manner. Careful hand washing is extremely important when caring for a person who has vomited or has diarrhea. The Health Department recommends that people with underlying medical conditions or who are immunocompromised; contact their physician if they become ill with a gastrointestinal illness. There has been only one laboratory confirmed case of Norovirus in a Pittsfield resident since January 1, but according to Pittsfield Public Health Nurse Mary-Jane Sackett, there has been considerable talk about the prevalence of gastrointestinal illness in recent weeks.