Winter is coming – help stop the spread of norovirus

NHS Ayrshire & Arran’s Infection Prevention and Control Team are reminding locals about norovirus, also known as the winter vomiting bug.

Norovirus is the most common stomach bug in the UK. It is estimated that between 600,000 and 1 million people in the UK catch norovirus. Although you can catch it at any time of the year, it is most common in the winter and although it can affect people of all ages, it is more serious and more easily spread among people who are already ill.

Bob Wilson, Infection Control Manager – NHS Ayrshire & Arran, explains: “The most important thing to remember is that norovirus is highly contagious - if you do have symptoms of diarrhoea and vomiting, do not visit relatives in hospital or a care home until you are free of symptoms for 48 hours. It is best to stay at home.”

Bob adds: “If there has been an outbreak in a hospital or care home where your relative or loved one is staying, only visit if it’s absolutely necessary, and visit only one person. Do not bring young children to visit. Avoid eating and drinking while you’re there, and as always, wash your hands before and after your visit.”

It can take 12 to 48 hours after becoming infected with the virus to show symptoms. You may be infectious to other people during this time. Symptoms usually start with nausea followed by violent vomiting and/or diarrhoea. You may also get a fever, headache or aching limbs. Although it is unpleasant and there is no cure for it, it is not usually dangerous. You will most likely feel better after it has run its course in a few days. The only real risk is dehydration which you can avoid by making sure you drink lots of liquid.
You can reduce the risk by following the infection prevention and control team’s top tips.

- Make sure you rinse fruit and vegetables before eating them.
- Keep all surfaces where you prepare food, and in your bathroom as clean as possible using bleach based cleaners.
- Try not to share towels, flannels or toothbrushes.
- Ensure that all surfaces are kept clean, especially after a person has vomited.
- Launder soiled clothes on as hot a wash as possible for the type of clothing. Do not overfill your washing machine or it will not clean them properly. Do not hand-wash soiled clothing as tiny droplets of water containing the virus can be dispersed in the air, contaminating you and the environment.
- While you are ill, avoid preparing food for other people if you can.
- Cook raw shellfish before consumption and wash all fruit if it is to be eaten raw.
- Stay at home – don’t go to see your family doctor (GP) because norovirus is contagious and there’s nothing your GP can do while you have it.
- Only contact your GP to seek advice if your symptoms last longer than a few days or if you already have a serious illness.

For more information about Norovirus, visit Health Protection Scotland’s website, www.hps.scot.nhs.uk.

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