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# Stay at home if you have symptoms of norovirus or flu

Posted on Wednesday 2nd January 2019

The NHS is asking people to stay at home if they have symptoms of flu or norovirus and not visit vulnerable patients in hospitals, care homes and the wider community, to limit the spread of any infection.

Infections such as norovirus and flu are currently circulating in the community and can spread extremely quickly in close knit environments such as hospitals and care homes. Norovirus, the most common cause of vomiting and diarrhoea, is a nasty infection for anyone who gets it but can be particularly dangerous for people with other medical conditions.

The virus can be unwittingly brought in to the hospitals and other settings by visitors who are displaying symptoms or are not 48 hours clear of symptoms and can spread more ward areas.

The impact can be serious on vulnerable patients who are already unwell, have a long-term health condition and for those who are frail.

Visitors to hospitals are being asked to stay at home if they or their family members have had diarrhoea, vomiting or 'flu-like' symptoms in the past 48 hours.

Visitors are also being asked to observe the practice of no more than two people visiting patients in hospital at any one time, and only one person accompanying each patient in A&E.

Clive Graham, Consultant Medical Microbiologist at and North Cumbria University NHS Hospitals Trust said:

*"When we have loved ones who are poorly and in hospital, it's natural we want to be with them, even if we're feeling under the weather ourselves. However, influenza and norovirus are particularly contagious and the risk of passing these infections on to the person you are visiting in hospital who may already be quite ill – as well as other sick people and hospital staff – is extremely high.*

*"When a flu or norovirus outbreak occurs, particularly in an environment like a hospital, it is difficult to contain and can lead to the closure of entire wards, putting a huge strain on local NHS resources."*

Norovirus is the most common stomach bug in the UK, affecting people of all ages. Like the flu, it spreads rapidly in closed environments such as hospitals, schools and care homes. It can be spread through contact with an infected person, by contact with contaminated surfaces or by consuming contaminated food or water.

There is no treatment for norovirus but it is important people who have the winter vomiting bug keep hydrated to combat the loss of fluids. People with norovirus will recover in a day or two, but will remain infectious for up to three days after recovery.

Common symptoms of flu include a high temperature, fatigue, headache, general aches and pains and a dry, chesty cough. The best remedy is to rest at home, keep warm and drink plenty of water to avoid dehydration. Paracetamol or ibuprofen may help lower a high temperature and relieve aches.

Anyone who thinks they may have flu or norovirus is advised not to visit a GP surgery, but to stay at home and call NHS 111 for advice if necessary.

There are simple steps people can take to reduce the risk of spreading norovirus:-

- Thorough hand washing – wet, lather, scrub, rinse and dry
- Don't prepare food while infected
- Immediately clean and disinfect surfaces after episodes of diarrhoea and vomiting
- Wash clothes and bed linen that may be contaminated thoroughly
- Drink plenty of fluids – stay away from caffeine and pay particular attention to the young and elderly for signs of



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To reduce the risk of spreading flu, people should regularly clean surfaces such as door handles, telephones and computer keyboards to get rid of germs (hand contact with infected surfaces is a common way for a virus to spread), use tissues to cover the mouth when coughing or sneezing, put used tissues in the bin as soon as possible and wash hands regularly.

To help prevent contracting the flu virus in the first place individuals in high risk groups can get their flu jab for free at their GP or pharmacy. Those who are eligible include:

- People aged 65 or older
- People with long-term conditions such as COPD, bronchitis, emphysema, asthma, diabetes or heart or kidney disease.
- Children aged two and three years old will be offered this vaccination by nasal spray. Your child's GP surgery should contact you.
- Children in reception class and school years 1, 2, 3 & 4 will be offered the vaccine at school. Your child's school will provide details from the local healthcare team.

More information about is flu is available at: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/flu/>

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