

# Norovirus and cruise ships

**Visitor industry operators should be aware and plan on the basis that cruise ships are regularly affected by outbreaks of norovirus.** The ships have procedures that involve confining sick people to cabins while they are unwell. There remains a risk that someone who is incubating the illness may come ashore and develop symptoms while they are undertaking onshore activities. There is no way to prevent apparently well passengers from disembarking nor to effectively screen passengers for illness.

## Operator Advice

As Norovirus and other communicable illnesses (illnesses with person to person spread) are always in the environment we advise the visitor industry to **always keep an excellent standard of hygiene** and staff awareness of hygiene procedures.

By law you must take all practical steps to ensure employees safety [Legal Framework](#)

You should also have a Health and Safety Plan. Here are tips on how to [make a Health and Safety Plan](#)

- Operations should always have hygiene procedures to protect all in their environs who come into contact with visitors
- The Cruise Operators Guide which is distributed at the start of the season advises that operators should ensure they have a health and safety plan if there is an outbreak
- **Gastroenteritis and Coach Travel – A guide for Tour Operators, is attached.**
- Online information about norovirus advises the testing often takes a while, longer than the illness - so people should always be careful around others.
- Norovirus [Ministry of Health advice](#) Ministry of Health [Cruise Ship Border Control](#) Information on [Notifiable diseases](#)

Here are some tips if you have an outbreak.

**Norovirus is always present in the community. It causes vomiting (often projectile), nausea, stomach cramps and diarrhoea. Symptoms may develop 10-50 hours (usually 24-48 hours) after being exposed and generally have a sudden onset. The symptoms last 2-3 days but can last longer. It is very contagious, so people who are immunocompromised are particularly vulnerable to becoming infected. Don't visit a hospital or rest home if you've been sick with a tummy bug.**

1. Norovirus is a common viral infection. Norovirus was previously known as Norwalk-like virus, and the disease it causes has also been referred to as viral gastroenteritis, winter vomiting disease, and 24-hour tummy bug.
2. Norovirus only affects humans. It can be spread directly from person to person by hand to mouth spread (faecal-oral), or indirectly via airborne transmission, contact with contaminated surfaces, or contaminated food or water.
3. Because the disease is highly infectious, Norovirus often occurs in outbreaks.
4. Symptoms of Norovirus can include nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, abdominal pain, muscle aches, headache, tiredness, and mild fever. Symptoms usually develop within 2 days of exposure to the virus.
5. The disease is self-limiting, with symptoms usually resolving within 24-48 hours without serious long-term health effects. Young children, the elderly and people with other illnesses may be more severely affected.
6. People with Norovirus are infectious while they are unwell and for several days after diarrhoea stops. However, a person can be infectious for up to 4 weeks following infection.
7. The best ways to prevent the spread of Norovirus infections are:
  - Careful handwashing at all times after going the toilet, changing nappies and before preparing food (20 seconds washing both sides of the hands with soap and running water, then 20 seconds drying).
  - If hands are not visibly dirty, alcohol hand gel is a useful alternative.
  - Keep sick people away from others. For Norovirus, this means that a person who develops diarrhoea and/or vomiting should leave work or school immediately, and should avoid other people and avoid handling food until 48 hours after diarrhoea has resolved.

- Clean contaminated surfaces such as toilets, bathrooms and other hard surfaces a sick person may have touched, with a dilute bleach solution.
- It is particularly important for people who have had diarrhoea and vomiting to stay away from places where there are large numbers of other people. Infections can spread very quickly in institutions such as hospitals, rest homes, schools and hostels, or at any type of social gathering.
- Contaminated food can also infect large numbers of people, and people who have had diarrhoea and/or vomiting should avoid handling food until 48 hours after diarrhoea has resolved.

8. People with diarrhoea and vomiting should drink plenty of fluids, preferably in the form of an electrolyte replacement solution (available from your chemist). If diarrhoea or vomiting persists, or there is concern about a sick person's condition, telephone your general practitioner or after hours service.

## **Gastroenteritis and Coach Travel – A Guide for Tour Operators**

provided by Public Health South (Southern District Health Board)

September 2014

Gastroenteritis, also commonly known as 'gastro', 'food-poisoning', 'tummy bug' or 'stomach flu', is caused by a variety of infectious agents, both viruses and bacteria. As well as being debilitating, gastroenteritis is often highly infectious and is easily spread from person-to-person.

### **1. Why gastroenteritis is important for tour operators**

Gastroenteritis is most easily spread when people spend long periods in close proximity, such as whilst travelling. Gastroenteritis is known to spread on coach tours and other visitor attractions.

Taking immediate steps is important as this will minimise the spread of the disease, avoid the possibility of delays due to disease investigation requirements and reassure other passengers that appropriate steps are being taken to avoid further illness.

For both individual companies and the wider New Zealand tourism industry, knowing how to prevent and manage gastroenteritis is good business practice.

### **2. What to look for**

Look out for passengers with any one or more of the following symptoms.

➤ Nausea	➤ Diarrhoea
➤ Vomiting (often sudden onset & projectile)	➤ Headaches
➤ Abdominal pain	➤ Fever

If two or more passengers are ill on one day, or consecutive days, this indicates the possible spread of gastroenteritis. A non-infective cause such as a hangover may also produce nausea, vomiting and a headache but not diarrhoea or fever, and rarely abdominal pain.

### **3. What to do if you suspect someone on board is sick with gastroenteritis**

**Isolate affected individuals** to prevent further spread of the disease. If possible:

- Move them to a spare seat away from others (if possible close to the toilet)
- Advise the sick person and all other passengers to be very diligent with hand hygiene

- Promptly clean any areas where soiling has occurred. Ideally, coaches should be taken out of circulation for thorough cleaning immediately following any soiling incident (diarrhoea or vomiting). If this is not practical, passengers should be taken off the coach and the driver should clean the area using the appropriate equipment as soon as possible.
- Bleach mixed with water is cheap and the most effective sanitiser. A mixture of 30mls (of a bleach labelled 4% sodium hypochlorite) to every litre of water is suitable to use as a sanitiser on a surface that has first been cleaned. Once cleaned apply the solution to the contaminated area and its surrounds at least 3 metres in all directions. Cordon off and air the area for at least one hour afterwards if practicable to do so. It is recommended that the air conditioning system is turned off and not started again until the coach has been thoroughly cleaned following its return to the base/destination.
- If there is no on-board toilet provide a receptacle for ill passengers to use if they are experiencing vomiting.
- Ensure that hand sanitizer is available and that there are frequent stops for passengers to use toilet facilities.
- Encourage affected people not to travel for as long as possible following the last episode of diarrhoea or vomiting (e.g. leave passengers behind at accommodation for extra nights). 24 - 48 hours is recommended.
- Advise accommodation providers, where affected people plan to stay in advance of their arrival, so that any necessary arrangements can be made.

**Notify the Public Health Service** (See Section 4) when two or more people are experiencing the symptoms described in Section 2 above.

### **Preventing gastroenteritis**

Frequently wash hands. Hand-washing is the most important factor in preventing the spread of gastro-intestinal infections. It is recommended that drivers remind passengers to wash their hands during scheduled stops. If possible, have an alcohol-based hand sanitizer available for passenger use.

Routine cleaning will generally reduce the risk of gastroenteritis, and a number of other infectious diseases from being spread onboard. Objects that are frequently touched should be cleaned often, particularly hard surfaces such as door handles, handrails, windows, mirrors, buttons, and other fixtures.

## **4. Who to Contact**

One of the local public health units, situated throughout the country, should be notified if you suspect an outbreak (2 or more cases) of any infectious disease onboard your coach. Public health staff will provide you with assistance, further information and answer any questions you may have. A list of phone contact numbers for public health units is attached in Appendix 1.

Otherwise contact with local public health units can be made via the local District Health Board. Using the telephone operator or a local phone book are the easiest ways to obtain the appropriate District Health Board's contact details.

## **5. Additional Information**

Additional information, including fact sheets and specific guidance on cleaning procedures and equipment can be sought from public health services (see Appendix 1 - Who to Contact).

On-going education and training are important to ensure the right people are aware of the actions to take if an outbreak is suspected.

## Appendix 1

### New Zealand Public Health Units

#### HPO – Health Protection Officer

<b>Public Health Service</b>	<b>Contact</b>
Northland District Health Board	Ph: (09) 430 4100 After hours: (09) 430 4100
Auckland Regional Public Health Service	Ph: (09) 623 4600 After hours: (09) 623 4600
Waikato District Health Board	Ph: (07) 838 2569 After hours: 021 999 521
Toi te Ora – Public Health Service	Ph: 0800 221 555 (24 hours) - Covers Tauranga, Rotorua, Taupo and Whakatane
Tairāwhiti District Health Board (Gisborne)	Ph: (06) 869 1311 After hours: (06) 869 0500 (ask for on call HPO)
Hawke's Bay District Health Board	Ph: (06) 834 1815 After hours: (06) 878 8109
Taranaki District Health Board	Ph: (06) 753 7798 After hours: (06) 753 7798
Mid Central District Health Board	Ph: (06) 350 9110 – Manawatu After hours: (06) 350 9110 Ph: (06) 348 1775 - Whanganui After hours: (06) 348 1234
Regional Public Health	Ph: (04) 570 9002 - Wellington After hours: (04) 570 9007
Nelson Marlborough Public Health Service	Ph: (03) 546 1537 - Nelson After hours: (03) 546 1800 Ph: (03) 520 9914 – Blenheim After hours: (03) 520 9999
Community and Public Health	Ph: (03) 364 1777 - Canterbury Ph: (03) 307 6902 - Mid Canterbury Ph: (03) 687 2600 - South Canterbury Ph: (03) 768 1160 – West Coast After hours: (03) 337 7899 (ask for on call HPO)
Southern District Health Board	Ph: (03) 476 9800 - Dunedin Ph: (03) 211 0900 - Invercargill Ph: (03) 450 9156 - Queenstown After hours: (03) 474 0999 (ask for on call HPO)