Norwalk-like Viruses

Norwalk viruses (a calcivirus) cause an intestinal illness which often occurs in outbreaks. Norwalk and Norwalk-like viruses have been linked to outbreaks of intestinal illness on cruise ships and in communities, camps, schools, institutions, and families. The true frequency is not known because there is no routine test for the virus available. The virus causes a short period of *nausea* (feeling sick to your stomach), vomiting, diarrhea, and *abdominal* (belly) cramps. Headache and low-grade fever may also occur. Persons with this infection usually recover within 2-3 days without serious or long-term health effects. Only humans are known to carry this disease. It usually has an onset 1 to 2 days after intake of infected food or water. **Severe illness or hospitalization is rare.**

CAUSE

People get Norwalk virus infection by swallowing food or water that has been *contaminated* (made unclean). This is usually with stool from an infected person. Oysters, clams, and shellfish from contaminated waters are an important source of this virus. It is also found in ice and water. Shellfish and oysters become contaminated from infected fecal matter from sick food handlers. The practice of some harvesters and/or recreational boaters of dumping raw sewage overboard can also contaminate. The only source of calicivirus is *feces* (body waste) from sick people. Outbreaks are often linked to eating raw shellfish, especially oysters and clams. Contaminated water, ice, eggs, salad ingredients, and ready-to-eat foods are other sources of infection.

TREATMENT

The only treatment for this virus is symptomatic. This means medications may be given for the nausea and vomiting. Fluid replacement may be given for *dehydration* (loss of body fluids).

PREVENTION

- Wash hands with soap and warm water after toilet visits and before handling food.
- Cook all shellfish thoroughly before eating.
- Wash raw vegetables before eating.
- Dispose of sewage in a sanitary manner.
- Food handlers with *symptoms* (problems) of Norwalk-like illness should not prepare or touch food.

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