



Noroviruses

What are they?

Noroviruses are a group of viruses that cause gastroenteritis in people. The term norovirus was recently approved as the official name for this group of viruses. Several other names have been used for noroviruses, including:

- Norwalk-like viruses (NLVs)
- Caliciviruses (because they belong to the virus family Caliciviridae)
- Small round structured viruses (SRSV)
- Unlike bacterial pathogens, SRSVs do not replicate on foods but they can remain viable for long periods of time on food, even at low temperatures.

Where are they found?

- SRSVs are found in the faeces and vomit of infected persons.
- Contaminated water is the most common source of SRSV outbreaks and may include water from municipal supplies, wells, recreational lakes, swimming pools and water stored aboard cruise ships.
- Filter feeding shellfish (e.g. oysters, mussels and clams) that are harvested from contaminated waters can contain SRSVs.
- Foods prepared by an infected person can also become contaminated.

Why are they a problem?

- SRSVs can cause a mild and brief illness called viral gastroenteritis, which usually develops 24-48 hours after infection and lasts for 24-60 hours.
- The disease is usually self-limiting and mild. The main symptom of SRSV infection is vomiting, however, nausea, diarrhoea, abdominal pain, headache and mild fever may also occur.

Who is at risk?

Most people who ingest the virus are at risk of infection although disease is more common in older children and adults.

How can the risk be reduced?

Food handling practices are important for minimising infections. It is recommended that:

- Infected food handlers should be excluded from food preparation processes.
- Raw foods should be washed thoroughly and all shellfish should be cooked and/or steamed thoroughly prior to consumption.
- Hygienic conditions should be maintained and cross-contamination should be avoided.