



## **Health Alert: Norovirus and Influenza A Subtyping of Hospitalized Patients**

**February 3, 2025**

Please review important updates from Skagit County Public Health.

**NOTE: Our 24-hour Communicable Disease phone number is 360-770-8852.**

### **Increasing cases of Norovirus**

Skagit County Public Health (SCPH) is alerting healthcare providers of an increase in Norovirus cases in Skagit County since the end of December. This highly infectious virus is seeing a [surge nationwide](#) as well.

A Norovirus outbreak is a [notifiable condition](#) in WA (WAC 246-101) and is defined as an “unusual number of patients/residents with Norovirus, clustered by time and place”. Learn more about disease outbreak reporting requirements [here](#).

### **Background**

Norovirus is the leading cause of foodborne illness in the United States responsible for nearly 58 percent of foodborne infections annually. A tiny dose of just 10 virus particles can cause illness, making it one of the most easily transmissible pathogens. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), healthcare facilities, including nursing homes and hospitals, are the most commonly reported settings for norovirus outbreaks in the United States.

The CDC has identified leafy vegetables, fresh fruits, and shellfish as a common source of norovirus outbreaks. On January 5, 2025, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) [issued its fourth oyster recall](#) in three weeks, reflecting an alarming increase in norovirus outbreaks across the nation.

Given the virus is not sensitive to cold temperature and is relatively heat resistant, foods that could be contaminated should be cooked at temperatures higher than 145 degrees Fahrenheit.

Soap and water work to remove germs from hands, while sanitizer acts by killing certain germs on the skin. Hand sanitizer's primary active ingredient is alcohol. **Alcohol is ineffective against norovirus** because the virus's protective protein shell, called a capsid, prevents the alcohol from penetrating and inactivating the virus.

To disinfect surfaces, the CDC advises using a "chlorine bleach solution with a concentration of 1,000 to 5,000 ppm (5 to 25 tablespoons of household bleach [5% to 8%] per gallon of water) or use an [EPA registered antimicrobial product effective against Norovirus](#).

Most outbreaks of norovirus illness happen when infected people spread the virus to others through direct contact. This can happen by caring for them or sharing food or eating utensils with them. Food, water, and surfaces contaminated with norovirus can also cause outbreaks.

Each year, there are about 2,500 reported norovirus outbreaks in the United States. Norovirus outbreaks occur throughout the year but are most common from November to April.

### **Recommendations for Clinicians**

- Follow guidelines in the [Norovirus Outbreak Control Checklist for Facilities](#).
- Rule out possibility of bacterial infection. Use Kaplan's criteria if no laboratory diagnostics exist or are delayed.
  - Vomiting in more than half of symptomatic cases, and
  - Mean (or median) incubation period of 24 to 48 hours, and
  - Mean (or median) duration of illness of 12 to 60 hours, and
  - No bacterial pathogen isolated from stool culture.
- Do not delay initiating outbreak control measures when waiting on stool test results.

- Place patients on Contact Precautions in a single occupancy room if they have symptoms consistent with norovirus gastroenteritis. You may co-hort patients/residents together if unable to place in single occupancy rooms. Isolate ill residents and patients until 48-72 hours after symptom resolution.
- Exclude ill staff until 48–72 hours after symptom resolution. In licensed food establishments, approval from the local regulatory authority might be necessary before reinstating a food employee following a required exclusion.
- Promote good hand hygiene, including frequent hand washing with soap and running water for a minimum of 20 seconds. If available, alcohol-based hand sanitizers ( $\geq 70\%$  ethanol) can be used as an adjunct in between proper handwashing's but should not be considered a substitute for soap and water handwashing.
- Staff who have recovered from recent suspected norovirus infection associated with an outbreak may be best suited to care for symptomatic patients until the outbreak resolves.
- Suspend group activities and communal dining for the duration of a norovirus outbreak.
- Remove all shared or communal food items for patients or staff from clinical areas for the duration of the outbreak.

### **Resources for Providers**

- [Guideline for the Prevention and Control of Norovirus Gastroenteritis Outbreaks in Healthcare Settings](#)
- [WA-IFS-CoE-Norovirus-Toolkit](#)
- [Responding to Norovirus Outbreaks](#)
- [Interactive Dashboard](#)
- [Key Infection Control Recommendations](#)
- [Norovirus Prevention and Control Guidelines for Healthcare Settings](#)
- [CDC Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report](#)

To report suspected cases, contact Skagit County Public Health at 360-770-8852. For questions, email [communicabledisease@co.skagit.wa.us](mailto:communicabledisease@co.skagit.wa.us).

Additions to the recent HAN - FAQs on subtyping of hospitalized patients

[Subtyping of Influenza A Recommended for Hospitalized Patients from WA DOH](#)

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Thank you for your partnership in keeping Skagit County healthy!



**Skagit County Public Health  
Communicable Disease Division**

Business hours phone: (360) 416-1500

**After hours urgent provider line: (360) 770-8852**

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