



Winter Vomiting Disease

What is Winter Vomiting Disease?

Winter Vomiting Disease (WVD) is a type of gastro-enteritis caused by a virus which occurs mainly in the winter months (although not exclusively).

Where does WVD come from?

Humans are the only source of WVD. The virus is found in the stool and vomit of infected people.

What are the symptoms of WVD?

A brief, mild illness usually develops one to two days after infection and lasts for one to three days. The main symptoms of WVD are:

- Nausea (feeling sick)
- Sudden onset of vomiting
- Diarrhoea
- Abdominal pain/cramps
- Headaches
- Fever
- Tiredness

How do I catch WVD?

WVD is spread easily from person to person in the following ways:

- Hands can become contaminated when using the toilet or changing nappies. The virus can then be passed on to others either directly or by some other substance including food.
- WVD can spread through the air from vomit and can infect other people.
- WVD can live on carpets and other soft furnishings for many days and can infect other people.
- Consumption of other foods that have been contaminated by infected food handlers. Foods implicated are mainly those eaten raw, or not cooked after handling e.g. ready to eat foods such as sandwiches, salads, vegetables and fruit.
- Consumption of raw or insufficiently cooked contaminated shellfish particularly oysters.

How will I know if I have WVD?

Diagnosis is usually based on the combination of symptoms and the history of the illness. If you are concerned you should talk to your doctor. Laboratory diagnosis of WVD is not carried out very often.

How can I avoid WVD?

Good hygiene, particularly hand washing, is very important for preventing WVD especially in certain settings and communities e.g. nursing and residential homes, schools, nurseries, food establishments etc. The following precautions should be taken routinely:

- Wash hands with soap and warm water and dry thoroughly after toilet visits and before preparing or eating food.
- At home separate towels should be used which should be changed and washed frequently.
- Cook all shellfish thoroughly before eating.
- Wash raw vegetables before eating them.

What special care should I take if I have WVD?

To prevent further spread of the virus it is also important that any equipment or furnishings contaminated with diarrhoea or vomit is cleaned thoroughly:

- A dilute solution of household bleach (follow manufacturers recommendations) is one of the most effective cleaning agents, although it should not be used on carpets or soft furnishings.
- The bleach solution can be used on items such as toilet seats, handles, doors and taps. It can also be used on hard floor surfaces.
- Soiled soft furnishings' covers should be washed in a machine at temperatures over 60°C.
- Soiled carpets and fixed soft furnishings should be cleaned thoroughly with detergent and hot water and preferably steam cleaned.
- If you are suffering from any of the signs or symptoms of WVD, make sure you use a separate towel and flannel from the rest of the family. Wash and change towels frequently.
- Take particular care when changing the nappies of children who are ill. Always wash your hands after changing nappies.
- **DO NOT** prepare or handle food for other people while you are ill.

How long should I stay off work or school?

- Most adults over five years should stay away from work until they are feeling better.
- If you are working in food handling/food preparation or with vulnerable groups such as the young, old, pregnant or immunocompromised, you should tell your employer about the illness. You should not return to work until you have been symptom free for two days and your stools are back to normal.
- Children attending a school, nursery, playgroup or child minder can return once they have been symptom free for two days and feel well enough.
- Adults working in a school, nursery, playgroup or as child minders can return once they have been symptom free for two days and feel well enough.

Who Cares if I have WVD?

Your GP and your local Environmental Health Officer care.

Your GP will give you advice about the medical aspects of WVD. Your local Environmental Health Officer may also contact you and offer advice and ask some questions to try to find out where the illness has come from.

For further information and advice, please contact the South West London Health Protection Unit on 020 8682 6132.