

**AN INFORMATION LEAFLET FOR PATIENTS**  
**ABOUT VIRAL GASTROENTERITIS**

Infection Prevention and Control Department  
Harrogate District Hospital  
Lancaster Park Road  
Harrogate HG2 7SX  
01423 885959  
Direct Line: 01423 553112  
[www.hdft.nhs.uk](http://www.hdft.nhs.uk)

Diarrhoea and vomiting can occur for a number of different reasons. For example, people may be affected by their medications, antibiotics or medical condition. Diarrhoea and vomiting may also be due to infection.

This leaflet is about viruses which cause gastroenteritis

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**If you require this information in an alternative language or format (such as large print), please ask your nursing staff to arrange this or contact the Infection Prevention and Control Nurses on the number provided on the back page of this leaflet.**

### **What causes viral gastroenteritis?**

Viral gastroenteritis is usually due to a small round structured virus (SRSV) which causes diarrhoea and/or vomiting in the hospital and wider community. It is most common during the winter and is sometimes called “winter vomiting” disease or “gastric flu”. One of the small round structured viruses which causes outbreaks is Norovirus.

### **Why is it a problem?**

Viral gastroenteritis causes symptoms of diarrhoea and/or vomiting. Symptoms usually last 2-3 days. Some people may have a raised temperature, headaches and aching limbs. The illness is usually mild in nature and gets better without treatment. Viral gastroenteritis, however, spreads very easily in schools, hotels and cruise ships, and in the hospital it spreads due to the close contact between people. Large numbers of patients and staff in hospitals can be affected. It is important that we try to stop the illness from spreading around the hospital and to relatives and friends.

### **How does this affect me?**

If you do become unwell on the ward you may be moved to a side room or to a bay with other patients with the same illness. You should have as few visitors as possible and they will need to wash their hands before and after seeing you. Visitors should ask for advice from the nursing staff regarding bringing in flowers, cakes, biscuits and other consumables as these will need to be thrown away when the bay or side room is deep cleaned following an outbreak.

### **Will I need treatment?**

Antibiotics are not needed to treat viral gastroenteritis. The main treatment is making sure you drink plenty of fluids. If you develop diarrhoea and vomiting a stool sample may be sent to the laboratory for testing. Once the illness is over no further action is

necessary and the treatment for the condition that brought you into hospital will continue as before.

### **Can I have visitors?**

We would recommend that visitors are kept to a minimum whilst you have symptoms, to prevent them from acquiring the infection. Although the symptoms are usually mild, children in particular should be discouraged from coming to visit you, as they may be particularly susceptible to the virus. Friends and relatives who are unwell, or who have a low immunity should not visit until you have had 48 hours without symptoms. Friends and relatives who are suffering from diarrhoea and vomiting themselves should **not** visit until they have had 48 hours without symptoms.

If you have any concerns at all about visiting, please discuss this with a doctor or nurse. To prevent the spread of infection whilst you have symptoms, your visitors should avoid visiting other wards and the hospital restaurant areas if at all possible.

### **Do visitors need to take precautions when visiting me?**

Visitors should wash their hands thoroughly before and after visiting you.

### **Alcohol hand gels and viral gastroenteritis**

The alcohol hand gels are not as good at killing the viruses that cause viral gastroenteritis as hand washing with liquid soap and water. Hand gels only work on clean hands. You may use the gels after hand washing, but we do **not** recommend you use the hand gel alone in areas where there is an outbreak of viral gastroenteritis.

This leaflet provides a brief summary of the infection control implications of viral gastroenteritis. If you have other questions or concerns, please ask the nursing staff, or they can arrange for you to speak to one of the infection prevention and control nurses.