



Individuals who have visited Sayers Croft since 10 March  
(Or their parent/guardian)  
Via Schools

**Health Protection Agency**

**Surrey & Sussex Health  
Protection Unit**

Leatherhead Office  
Dorset House  
Regent Park  
Kingston Road  
Leatherhead  
KT22 7PL

24 March 2010

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Tel +44 (0)1372 824262  
Fax +44 (0)1372 824307

<http://www.hpa.org.uk/sussexandsurrey/Surrey.htm>

To Individuals who have visited Sayers Croft since 10 March

**Re: Diarrhoea and vomiting associated with Sayers Croft**

We are writing to you because you or your child is/are now, or has/have recently attended a residential visit to Sayers Croft Field Centre.

A proportion of the staff and students in several groups who have been to such visits recently have been ill after returning, with diarrhoea and/or vomiting. In some cases, other members of their family have then become ill with similar symptoms.

We suspect that a common virus known as *Norovirus* has probably caused the illness. We cannot yet confirm this, but the symptoms shown by the people who have been ill are consistent with this. It is a moderately unpleasant, but thankfully fairly brief illness which does not cause any significant complications. It is usually over within about 48 hours, and is rarely serious. It is quite infectious, so it is very important to maintain scrupulous standards of hygiene around anybody who is ill with it (in particular, thorough hand-washing with soap and water – NOT alcohol gel). Please see the "*frequently asked questions*" on Norovirus in the appendix below for more information about this bug, and how to control it.

As we are not yet certain that the infection associated with Sayers Croft is caused by Norovirus, it would be very useful to get a sample from anybody who returns from Sayers croft and who has diarrhoea. If you think this may be possible, please contact us (in office hours) to discuss whether and how this can be arranged.

We have been working closely with Sayers Croft and the local Environmental Health Department to ensure that all appropriate measures are taken to ensure that this outbreak is brought to an end as quickly as possible. You need not be concerned about visiting Sayers Croft in the future.

Yours sincerely,

*[Not signed, as sent by email]*

Dr Peter English MRCGP, MFPHM, MPH  
Consultant in Communicable Disease Control

HPU-LeatherheadAdmin@hpa.org.uk (general enquiries etc.); Peter.english@hpa.org.uk (my eyes only)

## Appendix for all letters: Norovirus - Frequently asked Questions

Adapted from the Health Protection Agency website [www.hpa.org.uk](http://www.hpa.org.uk) (use the Topic A-Z and follow *N* for *Norovirus*)

### What are noroviruses?

*Noroviruses* are a group of viruses that are the most common cause of gastroenteritis (stomach bugs) in England and Wales. In the past, noroviruses have also been called '*winter vomiting viruses*', '*small round structured viruses*' or '*Norwalk-like viruses*'.

### How does norovirus spread?

The virus is easily transmitted from one person to another. It can be transmitted by contact with an infected person; by consuming contaminated food or water or by contact with contaminated surfaces or objects. The infectious dose is very low, swallowing as few as 10 - 100 virus particles may be enough to cause illness.

### What are the symptoms?

The most common symptoms are nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea. Symptoms often start with the sudden onset of nausea followed by projectile vomiting and watery diarrhoea. However, not all of those infected will experience all of the symptoms. Some people may also have a raised temperature, headaches and aching limbs.

Symptoms usually begin around 12 to 48 hours after becoming infected. The illness is self-limiting and the symptoms will last for 12 to 60 hours. Most people make a full recovery within 1-2 days, however some people (usually the very young or elderly) may become very dehydrated and require hospital treatment.

### Why does norovirus often cause outbreaks?

Norovirus often causes outbreaks because it is easily spread from one person to another and the virus is able to survive in the environment for many days. There are many different strains of norovirus, immunity is short-lived and infection with one strain does not protect against infection with another strain. Outbreaks commonly occur in semi-closed environments such as hospitals, nursing homes, schools and on cruise ships, where people are in close contact with one another for long periods.

### How can these outbreaks be stopped?

Outbreaks can be difficult to control because norovirus is easily transmitted from one person to another, its low infectious dose and because the virus can survive in the environment for lengthy periods. The most effective way to respond to an outbreak is to institute good hygiene measures such as strict adherence to hand-washing especially when handling food, after contact with infected people, and after using the toilet; disinfecting contaminated areas promptly; not allowing infected people to prepare food until 48 hours after symptoms have elapsed and isolating ill people for up to 48 hours after their symptoms have ceased.

### How is norovirus treated?

There is no specific treatment for norovirus apart from letting the illness run its course. It is important to drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration.

### If I'm suffering from norovirus, how can I prevent others from becoming infected?

Good hygiene is important in preventing others from becoming infected – this includes thorough hand washing after using the toilet. Food preparation should also be avoided until 48 hours after the symptoms have subsided.

## Who is at risk of getting norovirus?

There is no one specific group who are at risk of contracting norovirus – it affects people of all ages. The very young and elderly should take extra care if infected, as dehydration is more common in these age groups.

Outbreaks of norovirus are reported frequently anywhere that large numbers of people congregate for periods of several days. This provides an ideal environment for the spread of the disease. Healthcare settings tend to be particularly affected by outbreaks of norovirus. A recent study by the Agency shows that outbreaks are shortened when control measures at healthcare settings are implemented quickly, such as closing wards to new admissions within 4 days of the beginning of the outbreak and implementing strict hygiene measures.

## How common is norovirus?

Norovirus is not a notifiable disease so reporting is voluntary. The HPA only receives reports of outbreaks and we see anywhere between 130 and 250 outbreaks each year. It is estimated that Norovirus affects between 600,000 and a million people in the UK each year.

## Are there any long-term effects?

No, there are no long-term effects from norovirus.

## What can be done to prevent infection?

It is impossible to prevent infection, however, good hygiene measures (such as frequent hand washing) around someone who is infected is important. Certain measures can be taken in the event of an outbreak, including the implementation of basic hygiene and food handling measures and prompt disinfection of contaminated areas, and the isolation of those infected for 48 hours after their symptoms have ceased.

Handwashing with soap and water is the most effective method of reducing risk of infection - gels and wipes should not be used as an alternative to hand washing. Alcohol hand gel is not suitable for preventing the spread of this particular organism – and for other germs it is only effective on *clean hands*. Young children cannot be expected to understand and follow the guidance, so their hand washing should be supervised. Further guidance on hand washing is available at the Health Protection Agency web site, at: [www.hpa.org.uk](http://www.hpa.org.uk) (use the Topics A-Z on the home page, following *H* for *handwashing*).

Spills of diarrhoea or vomit should be cleaned up carefully, using bleach, or a product containing *hypochlorite*. Cleaning equipment should be disposed of carefully, or disinfected with bleach or hypochlorite. Ideally, contaminated soft furnishings should be disposed of, disinfected, or steam-cleaned.