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How to Prevent Nasty Stomach Bugs

Adapted from an Article by Melinda Wenner Moyer

It can survive on surfaces for days, is tricky to kill, and is the source of most stomach bugs in America. It's norovirus, and we're headed into prime season. Here's how to beat it. Research suggests that noroviruses can survive on surfaces for as long as *42 days*, and it only takes about *20 viral particles* to make a person sick. Yet one tablespoon of vomit contains a whopping 15 million viruses, and the same amount of stool contains up to 75 billion of the buggers. So if it does spread in your house, it's not your fault.

Keep your hands and the bathroom clean

When someone in your household gets sick, everyone in the family needs to wash their hands frequently with soap. Focus on scrubbing fingertips and nailbeds, where viruses linger. **Hand sanitizers, sadly, aren't effective.**

If you're fortunate enough to have a home with multiple bathrooms, designate one as the "sick" one that healthy family members don't use. If that's not possible, or if everyone has to share a bathroom, it is not overkill to clean surfaces every time a sick person uses the toilet.

This means cleaning the toilet, the handle, the sink, the doorknob—anything that a sick person or his or her fluids might have touched. Close the toilet lid before every flush, too, and maybe even flush a second time after pouring in half half cup to a cup of bleach.

Cleaning wipes don't work.

A little-known fact about noroviruses is that many household cleaners and wipes don't kill them. Clorox and Lysol disinfecting wipes claim to kill 99.9 percent of viruses and bacteria, but that doesn't include noroviruses. Your best bet is to wipe down surfaces with the bleach solution—**mix between a half cup and cup of bleach with a gallon of water**—or to use healthcare-grade bleach wipes, such as Clorox Healthcare Bleach Germicidal Wipes, which are hard to find in stores but are sold on websites like Amazon. Let the bleach sit on the surface for at least five minutes, ideally 10. Hydrogen peroxide cleaners are another effective option.

If a family member doesn't make it to the toilet in time, you'll have to clean up even more carefully. Consider wearing disposable gloves and goggles. A face mask is good, too, because

it keeps you from touching your mouth. In any case, really concentrate on not touching your face while you're doing all this.

To keep the viruses from becoming airborne as you clean, cover the fluid with paper towels, or shake kitty litter or sawdust on it, before scooping it all into a plastic bag. Then close it with a twist tie and dispose it. Scrub the area with soap and water and then disinfect it with one of the cleaners mentioned above. Also, don't just clean where you saw the fluid. It is recommended that you sanitize a 25-foot radius, including walls, table legs and any other surfaces that might have been inadvertently sprinkled with virus.

If clothes or washable linens get soiled, either wash them in the washing machine on the "hot" or "sanitize" setting (ideally with a half cup of bleach, if bleaching won't damage them) or put them in a plastic bag and quarantine them for a few days or weeks, because every time you handle soiled clothes, you risk spreading the virus.

Consider also designating specific plates, utensils and cups for sick family members, because *some dishwashers don't eliminate all Noroviruses*. And don't let anyone who's sick prepare food for anyone else.