# UK health officials warn of potential second wave of norovirus this winter



Health officials in the UK are issuing a warning regarding a potential second wave of norovirus infections this winter, particularly highlighting the risk of reinfection among individuals who have already contracted the virus. The alert arises from a shift in the dominant strains of norovirus, prompting caution from health authorities.

The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) has been diligently monitoring laboratory reports on norovirus cases and has noted significant changes in strain prevalence. Recent data indicates a surge in the GII.17 genotype, although it has decreased from 76% of cases in November to a current 59%. In contrast, the GII.4 strain has seen a steep increase, rising to account for 29% of cases, compared to only 10% three months ago.

While the UKHSA confirmed that there is currently no evidence to suggest that either strain leads to more severe illness than the other, the rising incidence of the GII.4 strain raises concerns about the possibility of renewed infections. The agency cannot yet ascertain whether norovirus cases have peaked this season, highlighting the need for continued vigilance.

Dr Chun Tang, a general practitioner at Pall Mall Medical, elaborated on the characteristics of norovirus, describing it as "a highly contagious virus that causes vomiting and diarrhoea, often referred to as the ‘winter vomiting bug’." He explained that the virus spreads primarily through contaminated food, water, surfaces, or direct contact with an infected individual. Symptoms typically manifest quickly and include sudden nausea, vomiting, and diarrhoea, accompanied by possible high temperature, headaches, and stomach pains. Most individuals recover within a couple of days, but dehydration remains a significant risk.

Dr Tang noted the lack of long-term immunity provided by norovirus. "Unlike some viruses, norovirus doesn’t give you long-term immunity," he stated. "There are many different strains, so even if you’ve had it before, you can still catch a different version of it." He highlighted that immunity is short-lived, further increasing the risk of reinfection.

The UKHSA data reflects that the two main strains currently circulating are GII.17 and GII.4. Dr Tang described the historical dominance of the GII.4 strain, which has been responsible for numerous outbreaks. Despite a current decline in GII.17 prevalence, its recent rise in some regions could indicate a changed response from the immune system. "The recent sharp rise in GII.4 cases suggests it may have mutated again, making it more infectious or better at evading immunity," he added.

The demographics most at risk for severe infections include young children, older adults, and individuals with compromised immune systems. Dr Tang reiterated that dehydration is the principal concern, particularly for vulnerable populations such as infants and the elderly, where dehydration could lead to hospitalisation if not appropriately managed.

Norovirus transmission occurs through minute particles present in vomit and stool, which can linger on surfaces or disperse into the air after episodes of vomiting. Dr Tang warned that only a small number of viral particles are needed to cause infection, explaining the rapid spread of outbreaks in communal environments. He advised that there is no specific treatment available; rather, recovery centres on rest and fluid intake.

While common belief suggests that alcohol hand sanitizers can eliminate norovirus, Dr Tang clarified that "norovirus is resistant to alcohol," emphasising the importance of thorough handwashing with soap and water to control its spread.

For the general public, the guidance from UK health officials recommends good hygiene practices, such as washing hands properly, avoiding close contact with sick individuals, and regularly disinfecting surfaces. Those experiencing symptoms of norovirus should remain at home for a minimum of 48 hours after symptoms cease to mitigate further transmission. If signs of severe dehydration or difficulty maintaining fluid intake arise, it is advised to seek medical consultation.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.gbnews.com/health/norovirus-warning-second-wave-vomiting-bug-surge> - This article corroborates the warning of a potential second wave of norovirus infections in the UK, highlighting the rise in cases and the shift in dominant strains from GII.17 to GII.4.
* <https://www.independent.co.uk/bulletin/news/norovirus-new-strain-outbreak-uk-b2705852.html> - This article supports the information about the shift in norovirus strains and the potential for a second wave, emphasizing the risk of reinfection due to the lack of long-term immunity.
* <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/norovirus> - This UK government guidance provides information on norovirus transmission and prevention strategies, aligning with the advice given by health officials on hygiene practices.
* <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/norovirus/> - The NHS website explains the symptoms and transmission of norovirus, reinforcing the information about its contagious nature and the importance of proper hygiene.
* <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/norovirus> - This World Health Organization fact sheet details the global impact of norovirus, its transmission, and prevention methods, supporting the article's description of norovirus characteristics.