

What is infectious gastroenteritis?

Gastrointestinal illness (gastroenteritis) is the inflammation of the stomach and small and large intestines. The main symptoms include vomiting and watery diarrhea. Other symptoms include fever, abdominal cramps, nausea, and headache. Infections causing gastroenteritis can be viral, bacterial, or parasitic in origin. Norovirus is a common cause of viral gastroenteritis found on cruise ships. Types of bacterial gastroenteritis infections include [Escherichia coli](#) and [salmonella](#).

How does infectious gastroenteritis spread?

Infections causing gastroenteritis can be spread by contaminated food or water or through an infected food handler. Individuals who are symptomatic with gastroenteritis can spread illness to others by touching handrails, elevator buttons, and shared utensils, as well as through direct intimate contact with others while they are ill.

Can infectious gastroenteritis be prevented?

Yes. You can reduce your chance of becoming ill by washing your hands more frequently, keeping your hands away from your mouth, and avoiding any food or water that is thought to have been contaminated. When a higher than expected number of passengers or crew become sick, ships implement additional cleaning procedures and use disinfectants that are targeted to stop the illness. More information on [handwashing](#) tips and techniques.

To learn more about gastroenteritis, visit <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/revb/gastro/faq.htm>.

What should I do if I become ill with diarrhea or vomiting during a cruise?

If you become ill during a cruise, visit the ship's medical center and follow the instructions of the medical staff aboard the ship. Be considerate of others, and wash your hands more frequently.

What can I do to stay healthy during a cruise?

For tips to stay healthy on your cruise vacation, see our [cruising tips](#).

What additional measures are ships asked to take when an increased number of passengers or crew become ill?

Ships may be advised by CDC to do the following to reduce the spread of gastroenteritis on a ship:

- implement additional disinfection measures and cleaning procedures,
- ask for stool or vomit specimens from passengers and crew,
- advise passengers and crew who are ill to stay in their cabins until they are well for 48 hours after recovery from illness,

- report numbers of cases of illness to CDC on a daily basis,
- discontinue certain high-risk activities or activities during a cruise.

Why have more outbreaks occurred since 2001?

More outbreaks have been reported since 2001 because:

- more passengers are sailing on more ships at sea, increasing the risk for spread of illness between passengers and increasing the total outbreak count, and
- outbreaks associated with noroviruses, a type of gastroenteritis spread from person to person have increased.

The ship that I sailed on had a high number of sick passengers or crew. Where can I find more information about the voyage?

The VSP Web site lists voyages during which the percentage of sick passengers or crew was over 3%, as well as additional outbreak prevention and control strategies conducted by the cruise line. You can find more information about the voyage at <http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/vsp/surv/GIlist.htm>.

Why are children who are not toilet trained forbidden from swimming in pools on cruise ships?

Children who wear any type of swimming diaper or who are diaper-aged are not allowed to swim because fecal matter may contaminate the water. This can expose other swimmers to fecal matter that is potentially infectious.

Why isn't the ship that I'm looking for listed in the inspection database?

The ship may not be in the inspection database because it does not meet the criteria for inspection, no foreign itinerary, no U.S. port or less than 13 passengers. VSP conducts twice yearly unannounced inspections. For more information about inspections, see <http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/vsp/scores/score100.htm>.

For more information about this program, visit:
<http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/vsp/default.htm>.