

### **What is gastro-enteritis?**

Many people don't realise that diarrhoea and vomiting symptoms are often viral gastro-enteritis. Although the gastro-enteritis virus symptoms are short-lived they can be very unpleasant and have a huge impact on hospital activities.

The symptoms vary but include combinations of the following - nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, stomach pain, headache and aching muscles.

### **What causes gastro-enteritis?**

This virus is commonly found in the community and can be spread person-to-person by several routes including contaminated hands and food and water. Outbreaks during the winter months are common. This virus is extremely infectious with up to 50 per cent of people in contact with the virus becoming unwell.

Large outbreaks often result in people bringing the virus into the hospital during the winter months, which lead, at worst, to staff shortages and restricted admissions to affected wards.

Any patients suspected to have viral gastroenteritis that require admission will be admitted to a side-room to prevent further spread.

Symptoms normally last between one and three days but people may still be infectious for two days after symptoms have stopped. Antibiotics do not help and sufferers recover without any specific medication.

### **How can we prevent the spread of gastro-enteritis?**

Handwashing is vitally important in preventing the spread of gastro-enteritis, especially after using the toilet and before eating. Wash them well with soap and water then dry thoroughly or use alcohol gel provided on the ward.

Visitors who are suffering with symptoms of gastro-enteritis should avoid visiting hospital if possible until at least 48 hours after their last symptom.