

# Consumer Awareness of Norovirus

In a recent study NoroCORE researchers found that less than half of U.S. adults had heard of norovirus, in spite of the fact that human noroviruses are the leading cause of foodborne disease in the United States. The viruses are easily transmitted through the fecal-oral route. This occurs via person-to-person spread, contact with contaminated surfaces, food, or water, or ingestion of aerosolized vomitus. Due to norovirus' ease of transmission, low infectious dose, and resistance to inactivation, prevention is key to controlling outbreaks. Appropriate prevention and control measures would include such behaviors as good hand hygiene and following effective clean-up protocols in the event of illness.

However, little is known about consumers' knowledge of norovirus infection and how to prevent and control associated illness. A nationally-representative Web-enabled survey of approximately 1,000 U.S. adults was conducted to collect information on consumers' awareness and knowledge of norovirus, as well as their personal beliefs on their vulnerability to contracting norovirus illness. Survey participants who had heard of norovirus were asked 22 true-and-false questions on the transmission, prevention, and control of norovirus. Only forty-seven percent of U.S. adults reported awareness of norovirus, though 85% had

heard of terms that commonly describe it, such as "the stomach flu." Only 36% correctly answered more than half of the true-false questions and 13% did not answer any questions correctly at all. Additionally, the survey revealed that most U.S. adults do not understand that the primary mode of transmission is fecal-oral, and many have the misperception that meat and poultry are causes of norovirus infection - when in reality, highly handled ready to eat foods, fresh produce, and molluscan shellfish are the most at-risk commodities for contamination.

The take-home message? Less than half of U.S. adults had heard of norovirus and most do not have basic knowledge on how to prevent and control norovirus infection. Most food safety education materials currently available focus on foodborne bacteria, not viruses, and those that do focus on viruses often lack critical information on prevention and control steps. The results of this survey will help inform the revision of existing consumer and food safety educational materials to include information on norovirus prevention and control.

USDA NIFA Food Virology  
Collaborative (NoroCORE)  
norocore.com  
norocore-admin@ncsu.edu

**NoroCORE**  
Food Virology  
Collaborative for Outreach, Research & Education

