



Norovirus Alert

March 26, 2024

The NPS Office of Public Health has received increasing reports of gastrointestinal (GI) illnesses among hikers and other individuals along the Appalachian Trail in areas of Georgia, Tennessee, and North Carolina. Norovirus is suspected as the cause of illness and has been confirmed diagnostically in at least some of the cases. The impact of norovirus in other areas and states along the Appalachian Trail is possible due to virus transmissibility and challenges to hand hygiene and sanitation along the trail.

Sometimes called the "stomach bug", norovirus is a highly infectious virus transmitted through direct contact with an infected person, contaminated food and water, and by touching contaminated surfaces and then eating or touching your face. Norovirus causes sudden onset of vomiting, diarrhea, stomach pain, and nausea 12-48 hours after exposure. Other symptoms include fever, headache, and body aches. Most people recover within 1-3 days but can still spread the virus for a few days after. Norovirus can cause dehydration.

Preventing Illness on the Appalachian Trail

To stop the spread of illness, please:

- Stay isolated if sick: Avoid contact, especially cooking for others, if you're ill or were ill in the last 72 hours. Practice good handwashing even after feeling better.
- Wash your hands: Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after using the toilet and before eating, preparing or handling food. If no handwashing sinks or bathrooms are available, bring a small bar of biodegradable soap and use clean water to pour onto your hands at least 200 feet away from water sources.

NOTE: Hand sanitizer does not work well against norovirus and should only be used in addition to thorough handwashing.

- Dispose of waste properly: Use disposable toilet bags ("wag bags") and carry out waste. When wag bags are not available, create a toileting and handwashing area at least 200 feet away from food preparation areas, water sources, trails, and campsites. Bury waste 8 inches deep.
- Filter and disinfect water for drinking and cooking: **Point-of-use filters alone will not remove norovirus from water.** Bring water to a rolling boil for at least one minute to disinfect. Information on backcountry water treatment can be found here: https://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/drinking/travel/backcountry_water_treatment.html
- Avoid shared food/drinks and commonly touched surfaces: Don't share food/drinks and avoid touching commonly touched surfaces such as water dispenser nozzles, trail logbooks, or privy door handles. Consider carrying bleach wipes to clean common surfaces before touching them.

Additional information is available at: www.cdc.gov/norovirus.

For questions, concerns, and to report an illness, please contact the NPS Office of Public Health Epidemiology Branch at publichealthprogram@nps.gov.