

What is Sapovirus?

Sapovirus is a common cause of viral gastroenteritis predominantly affecting children less than 5 years of age. It occasionally causes outbreaks across all age groups in schools, hospitals and other health-care facilities. Sapovirus-associated diarrhoea is usually mild although severe cases can rarely occur.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms typically begin after an incubation period of 1-4 days and include:

- Diarrhoea (mild/watery)
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Abdominal (stomach) pain or cramps
- Malaise/fatigue
- Low-grade fever
- Muscle aches

Many people with sapovirus infection may show no signs or symptoms. However, they are still contagious and can spread the virus to others.

How long does it last?

Sapovirus symptoms last one to three days and most people recover completely without treatment. However, for some people - especially infants, older adults and people with underlying disease - vomiting and diarrhoea may have a more prolonged course (e.g. 4-6 days), can be dehydrating and may require medical attention.

How is infection spread?

Sapovirus can spread to others by

- having direct contact with an infected person (fecal-oral contact)
- eating food or drink prepared by infected food handlers
- sharing cups or utensils with infected people
- touching contaminated objects and then putting fingers to mouth (e.g. surfaces contaminated with sapovirus particles from faeces).

How can infection be prevented?

People with sapovirus infection are potentially infectious from the moment they begin feeling sick until a few days after symptoms have settled, since the virus continues to be shed in faeces and can be passed on to others.

Appropriate hand hygiene is the most important way to prevent sapovirus infection. This is done by thorough hand washing for at least 20 seconds with running water and soap (normal or antiseptic). Alcohol-based hand sanitising gels may not be effective. Hands should be thoroughly washed after bathroom visits and before eating or preparing food. Household chlorine bleach solutions can be used to disinfect contaminated surfaces in the home (e.g. bathrooms and high-touch surfaces such as door knobs).