

## In the news

### NOROVIRUS STRIKES BACK

More than 1 million people are estimated to have been infected with norovirus in the United Kingdom this winter.

Norovirus is a single-stranded RNA virus that causes vomiting and diarrhoea. It is highly contagious, being spread through the consumption of contaminated food or water, or contact with contaminated surfaces or an infected person. There is currently no specific treatment for the infection, in part because the virus cannot be grown in the laboratory.

The UK Health Protection Agency (HPA) reported that there were 3,877 laboratory-confirmed cases as of 30 December 2012. However, they stated that for each reported case there are 288 unreported infections, increasing the estimated total to 1.12 million infected people, a 72% increase from last winter (*BBC News*, 2 Jan 2013). Moreover, norovirus infections normally peak in January, but the number of cases in the United Kingdom and Europe has now begun to increase earlier than in previous winters.

There have been more than 500 hospital outbreaks of norovirus in the United Kingdom, some of which have led to ward closures; however, a UK Department of Health spokesperson stated that “No A&Es have had to close so far this winter” and that the Department of Health is “providing additional funding to the NHS to help it cope with the added pressure that the winter brings” (*The Telegraph*, 2 Jan 2013). In addition, two cruise ships, Queen Mary 2 and the Emerald Princess, are reported to have had outbreaks of gastrointestinal illness that are suspected to have been caused by norovirus.

John Harris of the HPA stated that those who think they might have contracted the virus should “maintain good hand hygiene and stay away from hospitals, schools and care homes, as these closed environments are particularly prone to outbreaks which can cause severe disruption” (*The Independent*, 28 Dec 2012).

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