

What to do when somebody vomits

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When somebody vomits your concern is usually with the person concerned but, if food is being prepared nearby, you need to swing into action straight away to prevent a major disaster.

Particles from a number of highly infectious viruses are usually present in vomit and these easily become airborne in the form of aerosols and can then settle on surfaces and food. They are persistent and can stay infectious for a long period. From these sources of contamination many other people can be made ill unless you act fast.

1. Deal with the situation immediately.
2. Stop all food handling in the area.
3. Dispose of all potentially contaminated food.
4. Consider disposal of any food handled by the ill person that day or the day before.
5. Put on disposable gloves, disposable mask and disposable apron.
6. Use absorbent material such as paper towels to limit the spread of liquid soiling. Dispose of this carefully.
7. Thoroughly clean the area – all surfaces within range of aerosol fall-out.
8. Make up some fresh hypochlorite solution (e.g. from tablets) with at least 1000 ppm free chlorine.
9. Thoroughly disinfect all surfaces and equipment with this solution, leaving it in place for at least 5 minutes.
10. Rinse off as this solution is corrosive.
11. In both cleaning, disinfecting or rinsing, ensure that food is not contaminated by splashes of wash-water.
12. Food preparation should only recommence after complete cleaning and disinfection has taken place.



Although most disinfectants are good at killing bacteria they are usually poor at killing enteric viruses. If you don't use the hypochlorite tablets as described, you must ensure that your disinfectant will kill viruses and that it will achieve at least a 3-log reduction of enteric viruses in 5 minutes. Anything less than this will not be effective.

Be prepared

When potential contamination of food, equipment or surfaces from viruses has occurred you must act fast. You therefore need to be prepared for this possibility.

- Keep a stock of the necessary materials readily available – hypochlorite tablets and disposable gloves, facemasks, aprons, paper towels, plastic bags/bin liners.
- Ensure that staff are properly trained to deal with the situation without spreading contamination or making themselves ill. It might be a good idea to organise a dummy run.

