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US Olympic Committee remains 'dialed in' to prevent spread of stomach illness at Winter Games

A MIN AGO

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≡ **CNN Health**



Norovirus cases have been identified at the 2026 Winter Olympics in Italy. *(Yara Nardi/Reuters)*



Some Winter Olympics athletes are falling ill with norovirus, and Team USA says it's staying "dialed in" to curb the spread of the common stomach bug.

The US Olympic and Paralympic Committee is continuing measures to protect athletes from infections like norovirus, says Carrie Aprik, winter sports dietitian for the committee.

"These cases are a good reminder for us to stay dialed in our hygiene strategies — most importantly, frequent handwashing," Aprik said in an email Tuesday. "We also encourage our whole delegation to stay in close contact with the medical staff as soon as any symptoms arise."

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Cases of norovirus were identified among Team Finland, the International Olympic Committee said last week, **postponing** a women's ice hockey game with Canada. The game will now be played Thursday.



The Finnish women's ice hockey team gathers prior to the women's hockey match against Switzerland on February 10. (Piero Cruciatti/AFP/Getty Images)

The decision to postpone the game was made “collectively and in accordance with established health and safety principles,” the IOC said.

The virus has also been identified in one member of Team Switzerland. The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention **defines** a norovirus outbreak as “two or more similar illnesses resulting from a common exposure,” but IOC officials have **declined** to call these cases an outbreak.



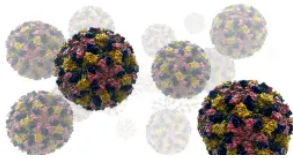
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Norovirus is the **leading infectious cause** of vomiting and diarrhea in the world. It spreads easily among people, especially on cruise ships and in other places where people live in close proximity.

It's also been identified at previous Winter Olympics. At the 2018 Games in South Korea, for instance, officials **scrambled** to contain the same virus.

“Illness mitigation is always top of mind,” Aprik wrote, adding that measures to reduce spread include disinfecting surfaces, frequent handwashing, avoiding sharing personal items like water bottles and following food safety practices.

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The virus has the potential to cause large outbreaks, said Dr. Dan Barouch, director of the Center for Virology and Vaccine Research at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in Boston, who is not involved in the Winter Olympic Games.

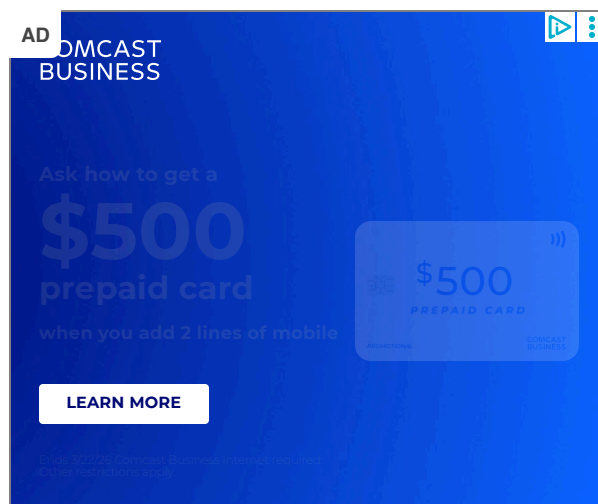
“The concern for the Olympics is that we hope to prevent a large number of people coming down with norovirus to avoid a disruption in competition. Ways to do that would be to isolate people who do have the disease and to quarantine people who’ve been exposed, and also to ensure there is good hand hygiene,” Barouch said.

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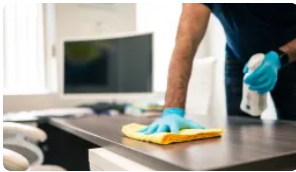
The “main risk,” he added, is that this virus is highly contagious and there tend to be more cases during this time of year.

“Whether that’s because people spend more time indoors or in closed settings, we’re not sure, but cases do go up in the wintertime,” Barouch said.

When someone is exposed to norovirus, they usually develop symptoms quickly, within 12 to 48 hours, and the most common symptoms include diarrhea, vomiting, nausea and stomach pain.

“The good news is that most people recover from it very quickly, too,” Barouch said.

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Although there is no specific antiviral treatment for the illness, “the most important thing for people who have it is to stay hydrated,” Barouch said. “If there is very severe nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, then people might need to go to the hospital for hydration or electrolytes. But for the vast majority of people, they might feel terrible for a couple days, but most people do recover very quickly.”

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If an athlete were to get sick with norovirus, “from a nutrition standpoint, ill athletes and staff are encouraged to maintain fluid/electrolyte intake to prevent dehydration, eat small/frequent meals and snacks of items that are easily digestible and palatable and consume key nutrients that can potentially lessen the length and severity of symptoms, such as zinc and probiotics,” Aprik wrote.

Food safety and preventing illness are an “incredibly serious” operation among Olympic teams, said registered dietitian Edwin Johnson, director of clinical nutrition services at South Brooklyn Health in New York, who is not involved with the Winter Olympics athletes but has experience in sports performance.

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“It’s a massive logistical operation. You have to remember that for these athletes, food isn’t just fuel; it’s a safety variable. If a swimmer gets food poisoning 24 hours before a race, four years of training just evaporated,” Johnson wrote in an email.

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“The advice we give is actually pretty similar to what you’d tell a smart traveler, just dialed up to an eleven. The golden rule is ‘familiarity over adventure.’ The Games are not the time to be an adventurous eater or try that spicy street food you saw on Instagram. We tell them to stick to what their gut knows,” he said.

“Beyond that, it’s about defensive eating. We recommend they avoid tap water unless it’s explicitly cleared, which includes ice in drinks and even brushing teeth in some regions. We tell them to skip raw foods like sushi or rare steaks, and even raw vegetables that might have been washed in local water,” he said.

“It sounds basic, but in a high-traffic environment like the Olympic Village, washing your hands before you eat is probably the single most effective thing an athlete can do to stay in the competition.”



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