

Viral gastroenteritis



This is a type of gastroenteritis (also known as 'gastro') caused by a virus. Many different viruses can cause viral gastroenteritis.

How viral gastroenteritis is spread

Viral gastroenteritis is spread through contamination of hands, objects or food with infected faeces or vomit. The virus is then taken in by the mouth. Viral gastroenteritis may also be spread through coughing and sneezing.

Signs and symptoms

Symptoms usually last 1 or 2 days and include:

- > mild fever
- > nausea and vomiting
- > stomach cramps
- > diarrhoea.
- > general sense of tiredness.

Diagnosis

Diagnosis is based on the history and clinical examination. Examination of a sample of faeces can sometimes identify the virus and should be done if the doctor suspects a bacterial infection

Incubation period

(time between becoming infected and developing symptoms)

24 to 72 hours

Infectious period

(time during which an infected person can infect others)

During the illness and for at least 24 hours after symptoms have disappeared.

Treatment

No specific antiviral drugs are useful for treating viral gastroenteritis. It is a common illness which may be particularly serious in young children.

The following are general recommendations for the treatment of gastroenteritis:

- > Give plenty of fluids. Oral rehydration solution is highly recommended for children with mild to moderate dehydration. It is available at pharmacies and should be given following the instructions on the packaging.
- > Mildly unwell children should be given their usual fluids more often. Carbonated (fizzy) drinks or undiluted juice should be avoided.
- > Medicines to prevent vomiting or diarrhoea should not be given (especially in children), except where specifically advised by a doctor.
- > Breastfed babies should continue to be breastfed throughout their illness.
- > Children on formula or solid diets should restart their normal diet (including full strength lactose containing milk) following rehydration with oral rehydration solution.
- > Children who are hungry or ask for food should be given small portions of their usual foods, but avoid foods high in sugar or fat.

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When to seek medical attention

Seek medical advice if there are any of the following symptoms:

Adults

- > signs of dehydration, such as thirst and decreased urination, lethargy, dry mouth, feeling faint on standing
- > fever
- > severe abdominal pain
- > bloody diarrhoea.

Children

- > signs of dehydration, such as thirst and decreased urination, lethargy, dry mouth, sunken eyes, feeling faint on standing
- > fever
- > abdominal pain
- > bloody diarrhoea
- > any symptoms in a child less than 12 months of age.

Prevention

- > Exclude people with viral gastroenteritis from childcare, preschool, school and work until there has been no vomiting or diarrhoea for 24 hours. If the gastroenteritis is known or suspected to be caused by norovirus, the exclusion period is 48 hours.

- > If working as a food handler in a food business, the exclusion period should be until there has been no diarrhoea or vomiting for 48 hours. Infants, children and adults with norovirus infection should not swim until there has been no diarrhoea for 24 hours.
- > Follow good hand washing procedures. Good cleaning procedures should be used, including for objects such as toys that may be shared.
- > Babies and small children without diarrhoea who are not toilet trained should wear tight fitting waterproof pants or swimming nappies in swimming pools and be changed regularly in the change room. When faecal accidents occur, swimming pools should be properly disinfected.

Useful links

SA Health food safety

www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/foodsafety

- > Handling and preparing food
- > Personal hygiene and food safety
- > Preventing food poisoning at home

SA Health website

www.sahealth.sa.gov.au

- > Collecting a faecal sample
- > Exclusion periods from childcare, preschool, school and work
- > Hand hygiene
- > Keeping areas clean

You've Got What? 5th Edition

Communicable Disease Control Branch

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The SA Health Disclaimer for this resource is located at

www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/youvegotwhat

Official

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*SA Health Safety and Quality Community Advisory Group.



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