

Viral Gastroenteritis

Viral gastroenteritis is an infection of the bowel caused by one of a number of viruses.

Symptoms usually last one or two days and include:

- > mild fever
- > nausea and vomiting
- > stomach cramps
- > diarrhoea.

Diagnosis is based on clinical examination. A faecal examination can sometimes identify the virus and should be performed to also rule out bacterial infection.

Spread is 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.

Incubation period

(time between becoming infected and developing symptoms)

24 – 72 hours.

Infectious period

(time during which an infected person can infect others)

During 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 administered 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.
- > Seek medical advice if any of the following symptoms occur:
 - signs of dehydration, such as thirst and decreased urination, lethargy, dry mouth, sunken eyes, feeling faint on standing
 - fever
 - abdominal pain, especially if severe
 - bloody diarrhoea
 - any symptoms in a child less than 12 months of age.

Control of spread

- > Exclude from child care, preschool, school and work until there has been no diarrhoea or vomiting for 24 hours.
- > Follow good hand washing and keeping areas clean procedures.

- > **Hand Hygiene**
- > **Keeping Areas Clean**
- > **Preventing Food Poisoning at Home**
- > **Collecting a Faecal Sample**