

Diarrhoea and vomiting

A guide for parents



Gastroenteritis is a common condition that causes diarrhoea and vomiting. It is usually caused by a bacterial or viral tummy bug. It affects people of all ages but is particularly common in young children. A virus called rotavirus causes most cases in children. Cases in adults are usually caused by norovirus (the 'winter vomiting bug') or bacterial food poisoning. Transfer of infection can occur very easily between people.

You can prevent infection and stop transmission by:

- ✓ **Washing hands with soap and water** (hand gel is not effective). Wash hands frequently and thoroughly, especially after using the toilet, and before preparing or eating food.
- ✓ Clean any surfaces or objects that could be contaminated and regularly clean toilets and sinks. Preferably with a bleach-based household cleaner.
- ✓ **Stay at home until 48 hours after the last episode of diarrhoea or vomiting**, or longer if the person still feels unwell. This includes staying away from places where there is contact with other people. For example, parties, childminders, after school clubs, youth clubs, swimming, football training, Sunday teas, weddings, dances and other social events.
- ✓ Wash contaminated items of clothing or bedding separately on a hot wash.
- ✓ Do not share towels or flannels.
- ✓ Adults should also follow the 48-hour rule, especially if their work involves food handling or working with vulnerable people (e.g. in a health or care settings).

Symptoms typically last less than a week but can sometimes last longer. You do not usually need to get medical advice unless your symptoms do not improve or there is a risk of a more serious problem. If you are concerned or need advice phone NHS 24 on 111 or contact your GP surgery.

To help ease symptoms:

- Drink plenty of fluids to avoid dehydration. Drink more than usual to replace the fluids lost from vomiting and diarrhoea. Water is generally best. Avoid fizzy or fruit juice as this can make diarrhoea worse. Diluting juice and soup are other options to try.
- Babies should continue to feed as usual, either with breast milk or other milk feeds.
- Paracetamol can help ease fever or aches and pains. Children may find liquid paracetamol easier to swallow than tablets. Your pharmacist or GP can advise on correct dosing.
- Get plenty of rest.
- If the person feels like eating try small amounts of plain foods such as soup, rice, pasta and bread.
- Use special rehydration drinks made from sachets bought from pharmacies if there are signs of dehydration, such as a dry mouth or dark urine. Your GP or pharmacist can advise on how much to take.
- Do not give children antidiarrheal or anti-vomiting medication, unless advised by your GP or pharmacist.

Immediate action required: Phone 999 or got to A&E if the person:

- may have swallowed something poisonous
- has a stiff neck, pain when looking at bright lights and/or a rash
- has a sudden, severe headache or abdominal (tummy) pain
- has blood in their vomit, or what looks like coffee granules
- is less responsive, or is a child that is floppy or unusually irritable

Urgent advice: Phone your GP if the person:

- has been vomiting repeatedly and is unable to keep fluid down
- has signs of severe dehydration such as a dry mouth, passing little or no urine, rapid heartbeat, confusion, persistent dizziness, or drowsiness
- has an underlying health condition such as diabetes (particularly if the person takes insulin) and has been vomiting a lot.
- there is bloody diarrhoea, poo that's dark or black, or green vomit
- Symptoms have not improved after a few days, such as vomiting for more than a day or two, or diarrhoea that is particularly frequent, severe, or lasts longer than 7 days.
- is a child that stops breast or bottle feeding while they're ill
- you are worried about your child

Visit NHS Inform www.nhsinform.co.uk for further information and advice.

If you need this leaflet in a different language or format, please phone 01595 743340.