

Rotavirus

Rotavirus is the main cause of diarrhoea and vomiting in children under 2 years

Transmission: Faeco-oral routes, respiratory droplets, are more likely in young children and older children who are unable to maintain good personal hygiene.

Incubation period: 2-4 days

Risk of transmission: High, attack rate 45% in families (75% amongst children)

Norwalk-like Virus (Norovirus)

Often associated with outbreaks in care settings. Can affect all age groups.

Transmission: Person to person due to vomiting and airborne spread, food and water have also been implicated.

Definition of onset: Acute onset vomiting, watery non-bloody diarrhoea with abdominal cramps, and nausea. Low grade fever also occasionally occurs, and vomiting is more common in children. Dehydration is a common complication especially amongst the young and elderly.

Incubation period: 12-48 hours

Risk of transmission: Very high, particularly whilst diarrhoea persists. No long term immunity.

For further information contact:

Your family doctor, health visitor

or

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The facts about VIRAL GASTROENTERITIS

What is it?

A number of different viruses can cause diarrhoea and/or vomiting. The two that are most commonly associated with the illness are called Norwalk virus and rotavirus.

What illness does it cause?

You may get symptoms of feeling sick, vomiting, abdominal pain and diarrhoea. Sometimes the vomiting may be severe and projectile. Some or all of these symptoms may be present. They usually last 2 days or less.

How do you get it?

Infection occurs when the virus is swallowed or breathed in. Airborne spread occurs especially when the infected person vomits and releases the virus into the air. In this way outbreaks occur, particularly in nurseries or nursing and residential homes. As the virus can settle out from the air onto flat surfaces these should also be thoroughly

cleansed. After an episode of vomiting it is always advisable to thoroughly ventilate the room.

Infection also occurs through consuming contaminated food or water but this is unusual.

The incubation period

When the virus enters a person's body, it takes some time to show signs of illness. This is called the incubation period. It is usually between 12 and 48 hours but may be shorter or longer than that.

The infectious period

A person with the viral illness may spread it to others. The spread may continue during the acute illness and as long as the person passes the virus in the vomit or stool. However, the most likely period of spread from person to person is while the person is acutely ill or has vomiting or liquid diarrhoea.

How do you prevent it from spreading to others?

Spread may occur in the household and beyond. The single most important thing to do to prevent the spread is to wash your hands thoroughly using soap and hot water, particularly:

- After using the toilet
- After clearing up any spillage of stool or vomit
- Before preparing/serving food or drink

- Before eating.

Use only disposable cloths for cleaning whenever possible. Soiled linen and personal clothing should be washed immediately. If this is not possible then they should be placed in a sealed bag until laundered. Contain any vomit or faecal spillage with paper towels soaked in disinfectant then place the vomit/faeces and paper towels in a sealed bag (or clinical waste bag) to dispose of. Before trying to vacuum carpets soiled by vomit or faeces, clean up the vomit or faeces using disposable cloths wherever possible.

Try and supervise hand washing in children. Pay special attention to frequent washing of toys. Clean door handle, toilet seat, flush handle and toilet surfaces using a bleach solution. Repeat this after each time the infected person uses them and also first thing in the morning and before everyone goes to bed.

How is the illness treated?

The main focus of treatment is re-hydration. Usually all that is needed is to replace the fluid and salts lost in the diarrhoea to prevent dehydration. However, if you have any worries about your illness you should consult your doctor.

Cleaning

If surfaces can not be safely cleaned with bleach and are not colour fast, hot soapy water or steam cleaning may be appropriate.

What about going to work or school?

Anyone with an illness due to a gastroenteritis virus should not return to work or school until he or she is well, has stopped vomiting and has formed solid stools.

- Children under 5 years must stay away from a childminder, playgroup, nursery or school until **48 hours** after the diarrhoea and/or vomiting has stopped
- Health care workers or nursery school staff who look after susceptible persons should stay away from work until **48 hours** after the diarrhoea and/or vomiting has stopped
- Persons who handle unwrapped food at work must stay away from food handling duties until **48 hours** after the diarrhoea and/or vomiting has stopped

Contacts with no symptoms may go to nursery/school/work as usual.