

Viral Gastro-enteritis

What is it?

This illness is caused by a number of different viruses including Rotavirus and Norwalk virus.

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms may vary, but yours may have included:

- diarrhoea - often watery;
- nausea;
- vomiting – which may be projectile;
- stomach pain and cramps;
- headache; and
- fever.

Symptoms usually start 10-72 hours after infection with the virus.

What about the mess?

- If you have to clear up diarrhoea or other mess, take care and wear rubber gloves. Scoop up what you can with a dustpan or paper towel. Rinse down a WC, don't use a sink that is used for food preparation or washing up. Wash what is left with cloths, and warm soapy water. Pour dirty water down a WC afterwards. Clean all cloths and equipment with dilute bleach (1 eggcup in a small bucket of warm not hot water);
- wash soiled sheets and clothing straight away. Fold them so that you don't touch the dirty parts. Wash on as hot a wash as possible. Do not over fill the washing machine;
- household hygiene is very important, disinfect the WC area particularly the flush handle, basin taps and light switches; and
- make sure everyone uses their own towel and face cloth.

How did I catch it?

The most common sources are:

- infected people (especially food handlers and others in households, nurseries and schools);
- the vomit or faeces of infected people;
- airborne spread is often responsible.

Other sources:

- eating or drinking anything containing viral gastroenteritis bacteria, particularly raw and undercooked food, especially shellfish.
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How long does it last?

Symptoms can last several days but are usually gone after 1 or 2.

How is it treated?

There is not a specific treatment for viral gastro-enteritis. It is unlikely that doctors will prescribe antibiotics.

It is important to keep drinking (clear fluids such as water or dilute squash are a good idea) to stop dehydration.

Plenty of rest will also help.

Can I give it to someone else?

Yes. Sneezing, coughing and vomiting can spread the virus through the air. Hands can spread the virus, so hand washing is vital and indirectly, contaminated surfaces such as toilet seats and handles, taps and switches can transfer the virus. They should be cleaned and disinfected regularly.

When can I go back to work/ school/ nursery?

If you work with food, are under 5 years old attending school/nursery or care for vulnerable people you should stay away until the diarrhoea has stopped for 48 hours.

What can I do to prevent getting it again?

1. Food

- If you are ill avoid preparing food for yourself or others;
- make sure all food is thoroughly cooked, and following cooking does not become contaminated with the virus;
- be careful not to spread the organism from raw to ready to eat food such as cold meats and salad;
- clean and disinfect worktops after preparing raw meat; and
- make sure your fridge and freezer are working properly. The temperatures should be 1 - 4°C and minus 18°C respectively. If you do not have a fridge thermometer, why not buy one.

2. Wash your hands

Everyone in the household should take care to wash their hands properly with soap and rinse them under running water after using the toilet and:

- after you've cleared up diarrhoea;
- after you've been nursing ill people;
- after you've handled laundry or changed nappies;
- before you cook or eat; and
- often during the preparation of food (especially after handling raw meat).

An antibacterial soap is an additional precaution.

For further information please contact:

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