

Gastroenteritis

What is it?

- Inflammation of the stomach and intestines that often results in diarrhea and/or vomiting
- Diarrhea is usually mild and brief and occurs when bowel movements are less formed and more watery.
- When diarrhea or vomiting is caused by an infection it is often called “acute gastroenteritis”, or “stomach flu”.
- Infection is usually caused by **viruses** (e.g. rotavirus or Norovirus). It can also be caused by **bacteria** (e.g. *Shigella*, *E.coli*, *Salmonella*, *Campylobacter* & *Yersinia*) or **parasites** (e.g. *Giardia*).
- Diarrhea or vomiting may also be caused by dietary changes, medications, or other causes.

How is it spread?

- Germs can be found in the stool or vomit of infected people and spread easily to others:
 - By eating food or drinking liquid that is contaminated
 - If they touch their mouth after touching contaminated surfaces or objects.
 - When in direct contact with an infected person who has symptoms
- Contact with animals (e.g. pets, farm animals, reptiles) can also spread germs

What are the symptoms?

- More bowel movements than usual and stools that are less formed and more watery.
- Other symptoms may include fever, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, stomach pains, cramps and blood and/or mucous in the stool.

When do symptoms start and how long is it contagious?

- It varies, depending on the cause.

How is it treated?

- Drink plenty of fluids to avoid dehydration
- SEEK MEDICAL ATTENTION IF ANY CONCERNS.

How is it prevented?

- Those with diarrhea and/or vomiting should not prepare meals or feed others. If absolutely necessary, do proper hand washing prior to preparing food and before feeding someone.

- Clean and disinfect washrooms and common touch surfaces (e.g., doorknobs, taps) more frequently

Hand washing is the most important way to stop the spread of infectious gastroenteritis. Wash hands often with warm water and soap for at least 15 seconds or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer, especially:

- after diaper changes, toileting or using the bathroom
- after handling pets or animals or their waste
- for children who have diarrhea, especially if they are still in diapers

Safe Food Handling

- Wash fruits and vegetables, especially if eating raw
- Separate raw food from cooked food
- Wash hands, utensils, chopping boards and surfaces carefully after handling raw meat to prevent cross-contamination
- Cook meat, poultry and eggs thoroughly
- Keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold
- Always use water that has been treated or tested

You may need to stay home from childcare, school, work or group activities.

For further information, please contact the Communicable Disease Control Program staff at 705-474-1400 or 1-800-563-2808, ext 5229.

References:

Canadian Paediatric Society (2013). Dehydration and diarrhea in children: Prevention and treatment. Retrieved from: http://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/dehydration_and_diarrhea

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