



GASTROENTERITIS FACT SHEET

What is Gastroenteritis?

Gastroenteritis is an inflammation of the stomach and intestine. There are many causes of Gastroenteritis- some are more serious than others. Viruses, such as Norovirus, are the most common cause of Gastroenteritis and result in vomiting and/or diarrhea. This is often called “stomach flu” but it is not related to the influenza virus.

What are the symptoms of viral Gastroenteritis?

Most people will get sick between 1 to 2 days after being exposed to the virus. The infection comes on quickly with symptoms of:

- Vomiting
- Watery diarrhea without blood
- Abdominal cramps
- Headache
- Low-grade fever

These symptoms can last for 1 to 10 days depending on the virus.

Do I need treatment?

Most people get better without any problems. Young children, elders and people with health problems may be at risk for dehydration.

- People become dehydrated when they do not drink enough liquids to replace the fluids they are losing from vomiting and having diarrhea.

Adults with dehydration will feel thirsty, go pee less often and feel dizzy when standing up. Avoid drinking fluids with caffeine (e.g., coffee and pop). Avoid drinking alcohol. These beverages can make your dehydration worse.

Reasons to contact your health care provider:

- If the diarrhea is bloody
- If there is high fever (over 38 degrees Celsius)
- If you think you or someone you are caring for is more seriously dehydrated, contact your health care provider or go to the emergency room.

How do I get viral Gastroenteritis?

Viruses that cause Gastroenteritis are found in the stool and sometimes in the vomit of someone who is sick. They are very contagious and can spread easily to other people by:

- Having close contact with someone who is infected and has symptoms
- Eating food or drinks that are contaminated with the virus
- Touching surfaces or objects that are contaminated and then putting contaminated fingers in the mouth (touching a door knob and then touching your mouth)

- Common situations for viral Gastroenteritis outbreaks:
 - o Children in child-care centres sharing toys
 - o Elderly persons in long term care facilities
 - o Other settings where groups of people congregate

What do I do if I have viral Gastroenteritis?

- Keep your hands clean! Wash your hands with soap and water often, and especially after using the toilet, changing a diaper and before preparing or eating food. If you use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, make sure it is at least 70% alcohol.
- Do not prepare food for others if you are sick.
- Do not go to work or school. You can spread the virus from the time you are sick to two days after the diarrhea and vomiting stops. Stay at home for 48 hours after you no longer have symptoms
- Clean with bleach. Disinfect your environment by cleaning surfaces that are touched often (e.g., door handles, toys, bathroom surfaces) with a chlorine bleach solution. Mix 2 teaspoons of household bleach into 2 cups of water to make the disinfection solution. Spray the solution on surfaces and wipe or rinse clean. Clean toilets and sinks often, especially if they are shared with other people.
- Wash laundry thoroughly. Clothing and linens that have been dirtied by vomiting or diarrhea should be handled with rubber gloves, washed with detergent at the maximum cycle length time and machine dried.
- There is no treatment for viral Gastroenteritis. Antibiotics are not used because it is a virus.
- Drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration.

Proper handwashing is your best defence!