



# Health Alert

The Centre is in

## Gastroenteritis Outbreak (Diarrhoea, Vomiting, Fever)

Please read below for further information

### Description

Gastroenteritis is an illness triggered by the infection and inflammation of the digestive system. Typical symptoms include abdominal cramps, diarrhoea (an increase in the frequency, runniness or volume of the faeces) and vomiting. In many cases the condition is self-limiting and resolves in a few days. The main complication of gastroenteritis is dehydration, but this can be prevented if the fluid lost in vomit and diarrhoea is replaced. A person suffering from severe gastroenteritis may need fluids intravenously. Some of the causes of gastroenteritis are:

- Viruses – such as Norovirus, Rotavirus and Adenoviruses.
- Bacteria – such as Campylobacter, Salmonella and Shigella.
- Parasites – such as Giardia and Cryptosporidium.
- Bacterial toxins – the bacteria themselves don't cause illness but their poisonous by-products can contaminate food. For example some strains of staphylococcal bacteria produce toxins that can cause gastroenteritis.
- Chemicals – copper poisoning, for example, can cause gastroenteritis.
- Drugs – certain drugs, such as antibiotics, can cause gastroenteritis in susceptible people.

The exact cause of the diarrhoea can only be diagnosed by laboratory tests of faecal specimens; sometimes multiple specimens must be tested.

### Incubation Period

Viral and bacterial infections, usually 1-3 days.

Parasitic infections, 5-15 days.

### Infectious Period

People are infectious for as long as the organisms are present in their faeces, whether or not they have symptoms.

### Exclusion Period

Children are to be excluded from the Centre for **2 full days** after their body has returned to normal temperature and bodily function (no loose bowel motions or vomiting).

**For example, if the last vomit or loose bowel motion is at 3am on a Sunday, the child is not to return to the Centre until Wednesday.**

### Responsibilities of Child Care Providers/Staff

Inform the director, who can then inform parents that the illness is present in the centre.

When two or more children in one group are ill with diarrhoea, your public health unit should be contacted for advice and help in controlling the outbreak.

## Responsibilities of Parents

Observe the exclusion period.

## Controlling the spread of infection

A person with active diarrhoea is more likely to spread the disease than one who is well but has infectious organisms in their faeces. For this reason, children and staff with infectious diarrhoea should not attend the centre until diarrhoea has stopped for **2 full days**.

Do not exclude children or staff with disease causing organisms in their first faeces but no diarrhoea.

Staff with disease causing organisms in their faeces but no diarrhoea should not be involved in the preparation of food.

Make sure that effective hand washing and cleaning procedures are being followed in the centre and at home.

Keep cold food cold (below 5°C) and hot food hot (about 60°C) to discourage the growth of bacteria. Reheat food and hold at 70°C for 2 minutes.

## Treatment

### Preventing dehydration in children with gastroenteritis

Children with diarrhoea need extra fluid to replace what they lose. However, many fluids have too much sugar and the wrong amount of salt. Giving a sick child the wrong kind of fluid can lead to more dehydration and illness.

### Breastfed children

Breastfeeding mothers should continue to breastfeed and offer the breast more often.

### Safe drinks

The best fluids to give contain a mixture of special salts (electrolytes) and sugars. You can buy oral rehydration solution from the chemist. Mix the sachet or powder with water, not other kinds of fluids. Mix solution according to manufacturer's instructions.

If children refuse oral rehydration solution they may be given diluted soft drinks or fruit juice.

- Diluted cordial 10ml + 150ml water.
- Diluted soft drink (eg lemonade) 50ml + 150 ml water.
- Diluted fruit juices 50ml + 150ml water.

### Unsafe drinks

Do not give undiluted fruit juice, fizzy drinks, 'sports drinks' or 'energy drinks' or cordial to children with diarrhoea. They may increase diarrhoea and dehydration.

### Bottle/Formula fed babies

Continue normal strength formula or milk if the child is hungry, and offer oral rehydration solution or safe drinks as recommended above. Remember that withholding formula for more than 24 hours may result in the baby losing weight.

### Re-introducing food

Re-introduce food for 24 hours, even if the diarrhoea has not settled. Suitable foods to start off with include bread, plain biscuits, potatoes, rice, noodles, vegetables, plain meats, fish and eggs. Gradually re-introduce other foods, such as dairy foods and sweet foods such as jelly, honey and jam.

## Comments

Children with diarrhoea, who vomit or refuse extra fluids should see a doctor. In severe cases hospitalisation may be needed.

Staying Healthy In Child Care – 4th Edition