# Let's Talk ABOUT...

### Gastroenteritis, including Norovirus and Rotavirus

**Gastroenteritis** (gas-troh-enter-ITE-us) happens when the stomach and lining of the intestines are irritated. This irritation causes diarrhea. Your child may also have belly cramps or vomiting.

Gastroenteritis is often caused by a virus. **Norovirus** (nor-o-vi-rus) and **rotavirus** (ro-ta-vi-rus) are two of the most common cause of gastroenteritis and diarrhea in children in the United States.

**Norovirus:** It takes 12-48 hours after contact with the virus until the person gets sick. Symptoms may last for two to five days. Children and adults can get sick from this virus and it can happen more than once. There is no vaccine to prevent norovirus.

**Rotavirus:** It takes one to three days after contact with the virus until the person gets sick. Symptoms may last for three to eight days. The most common age to get rotavirus is between three months and three years of age. It usually happens from November to May, but can happen at any time. Adults sometimes get rotavirus, but it is usually a mild illness. There is a vaccine to prevent Rotavirus.

## What are the symptoms of gastroenteritis?

#### In the first 12 to 48 hours (the first phase):

Usually, the child becomes sick suddenly with:

- Low-grade fever (100° F/38° C)
- Vomiting
- Frequent, forceful diarrhea
- Bowel movements are watery, foul smelling, and usually green

#### After the first 12-48 hours the child may have:

- Continuing diarrhea for three to nine days.
- Dehydration (not enough fluids in the body).
   This is a serious problem. Some children may

need to be admitted to the hospital. See the handout *Let's Talk About... Dehydration and Diarrhea* for complete instructions on how to care for these problems and how to know if your child is dehydrated.

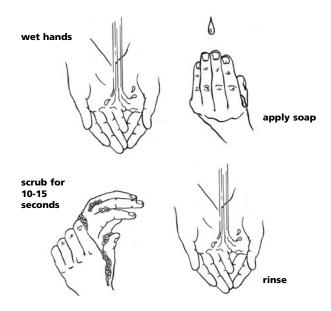
#### **How do I prevent gastroenteritis?**

Rotavirus vaccine is the best way to prevent children from getting rotavirus. The vaccine is a liquid given by mouth, not a shot. The Rotavirus vaccine protects children from the disease or limits the infection so it is a milder illness. Three doses of the vaccine are recommended. These are given at two months, four months and six months of age. The 3-dose series needs to be started by 15 weeks of age or earlier. Just like any medicine, sometimes vaccines cause problems. However, getting the rotavirus vaccine is much safer than getting the disease. If you want more information you can ask your doctor or nurse, or call your local health department.

It is easy to get infected with a virus that causes gastroenteritis. This happens if you touch items that are contaminated with emesis (vomit) or stool (poop) and then touch your mouth area. Children can spread the virus when they forget to wash their hands after using the bathroom or before eating. Young toddlers and babies can spread the virus on toys they put in their mouth when they are sick. Norovirus and rotavirus can survive for days on surfaces and for hours on your hands. It can be in the stool of an infected person for days after the sickness starts. A good way to stop spreading the illness is to clean surfaces and to wash you and your child's hands.

Follow these precautions:

 If possible, use disposable gloves when you change your child's diaper or clean up emesis.



- Wash your hands often, especially after changing diapers and cleaning up emesis. Have other people who come in contact with your child do the same. Wash your hands for 15 to 30 seconds with soap and water after going to the bathroom, before eating, or when handling dirty linen and diapers. It is especially important to wash your hands before preparing food.
- Clean and disinfect toys and other objects that might be contaminated with the virus. Lysol®, 409®, or a similar cleaner/disinfectant wipe are good to use.

#### How do you treat gastroenteritis?

Your child will probably be miserable for the first 12 to 48 hours. If he has diarrhea, do not take him to day care or school. Make your child as comfortable as possible and keep him from getting dehydrated. See the handout *Let's Talk About... Dehydration and Diarrhea* for complete instructions on how to take care of your child at home during the diarrhea. You should give him clear fluids, but do not force them. Begin giving him soft and then solid foods, but do this slowly. Complex carbohydrates (like bread, cereal, rice, pasta), lean meats, yogurt, fruits and vegetables are best. It is ok for your child to have milk. Avoid juices such as apple and pear because they can make diarrhea worse. Some doctors

tell their patients to eat a "CRAM" diet. (Chicken, Rice, and Milk). Many doctors tell their patients to eat a regular diet as long as the child drinks extra fluids to make up for all the fluids lost in bowel movements.

## How do I know if my child is dehydrated?

Check for dehydration; look for these signs:

- Sunken eyes
- The soft spot is sunken on top of a baby's head
- Dry mouth and tongue
- No tears
- No urine in 12-18 hours
- Unusually sleepy or tired

Dehydration is a serious problem. Call your doctor if you think your child may be dehydrated. Dehydration may need to be treated in the hospital.

#### What happens in the hospital?

A sample of your child's stool (poop) might be sent to the laboratory for testing. Once it is sent it takes about 24 hours to get the results back.

When your child has diarrhea or is tested for Norovirus or Rotavirus he will be treated with "contact precautions." This means that all healthcare providers will wear gloves and yellow gowns when they enter your child's room to care for him. Families and visitors might need to wear gloves and gowns, so you should check with your child's nurse. Everyone should do hand hygiene (wash their hands) when they leave. Your child cannot leave the room as long as he has diarrhea symptoms because this infection can spread to other patients. People can usually spread the disease until the diarrhea stops.

In the hospital, your child will receive fluids until his intestines work normally. Your child may be allowed to eat only clear liquids or he may have an IV (a tiny tube inserted into a vein) to replace fluids. Acetaminophen (Tylenol®) is often the only medicine used. Anti-diarrhea medicines may hide

symptoms and do not allow the body to get rid of the virus.

When the diarrhea and vomiting improve, your child may slowly begin to eat a normal diet. Your child can go home when he can drink fluids without increasing his bowel movements, and he can take in more than he loses with his bowel movements.

#### What if I have more questions?

If you have more questions, the physicians and nurses are always available to help answer your questions during your hospital stay and to help make you feel as comfortable as possible.

