

Let's Talk About...

Gastroenteritis, including Norovirus and Rotavirus

Gastroenteritis (gas-troh-enter-ITE-us) is a term for stomach or intestinal irritation or inflammation. It can often cause diarrhea, vomiting, and belly cramps.

Gastroenteritis is often caused by an infection.

Norovirus (nor-o-vi-rus) and **rotavirus** (ro-ta-vi-rus) are two of the most common viral causes of gastroenteritis and diarrhea in children in the United States.

Norovirus:

It takes 12–48 hours after contact with the norovirus for a person to get sick. Symptoms may last for 2–5 days. Approximately 1 in 15 children and adults will get sick from the norovirus this year, and it can happen more than once. There is no vaccine to prevent norovirus.

Rotavirus:

A person who gets the rotavirus will become sick 1–3 days after contact. Symptoms may last for 3–10 days. Children usually get the rotavirus when they are between 3 months and 3 years old. Adults can get rotavirus, but it is usually a mild illness. There is a rotavirus vaccine.

What are the signs of gastroenteritis?

In the first 12–48 hours (the first phase), the child usually becomes sick suddenly with:

- Low-grade fever (100° F/38° C)
- Vomiting
- Frequent, forceful diarrhea
- Abdominal cramps
- Low energy

After the first 12–48 hours, the child may have:

- Continuing diarrhea for 3–9 days.
- Dehydration (not enough fluids in the body). This is a serious problem, and some children may need to be admitted to the hospital.

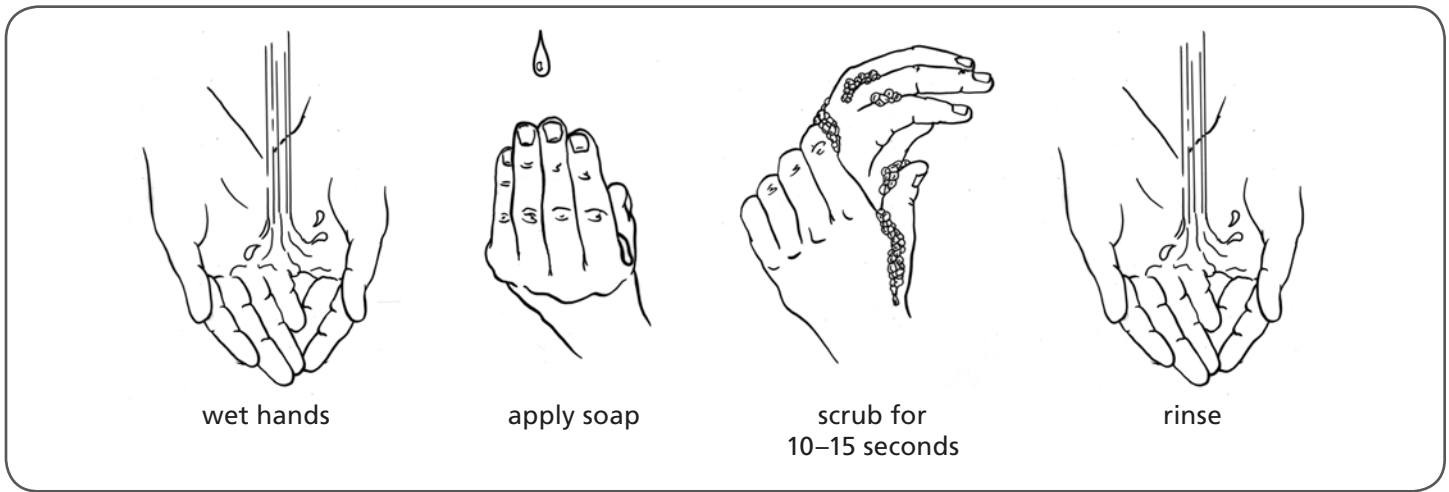
How do I prevent gastroenteritis?

Rotavirus vaccine is the best way to prevent children from getting rotavirus. The vaccine is a liquid given by mouth, not a shot. It protects children from the disease or limits the infection, making it a milder illness.

Three doses of the vaccine are recommended and given when your child is 2 months, 4 months, and 6 months old. The three-dose series needs to be started before or at 15 weeks old. Just like any medicine, sometimes vaccines cause problems; however, getting the rotavirus vaccine is much safer than getting the illness. If you want more information, ask your healthcare provider, or call your local health department.

It is easy to be infected with a virus or bacteria that causes gastroenteritis. This happens if you touch items or food 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 an infected person's stool for days after the sickness starts. A good way to stop spreading the illness is to clean surfaces and to wash your child's hands (and yours) often.



Follow these precautions:

- If possible, use disposable gloves when you change your child’s diaper or clean up vomit.
- Wash your hands often, especially after changing diapers and cleaning up vomit, and have other people around your child do the same. Scrub for 15–30 seconds with soap and water after going to the bathroom, before eating, or when handling dirty linens 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 using an antibacterial cleaner such as Lysol or 409. Disinfectant wipes are also good to use.

How do you treat gastroenteritis?

Your child will probably be miserable for the first 12–48 hours. If they have diarrhea, do not take them to day-care or school. Make your child as comfortable as possible and keep them from getting dehydrated.

You should give your child small amounts (about 1 ounce) of clear fluids, but do not force them. Begin giving your child soft and then solid foods, but do this slowly. Complex carbohydrates (like bread, cereal, rice, and pasta), lean meats, yogurt, fruits, and vegetables are best.

It is okay for your child to have milk, although some children might be sensitive to lactose. Avoid apple and pear juices; they can make diarrhea worse. Some doctors tell their patients to eat a CRAM (cereal, rice, applesauce, and milk) diet. Many healthcare providers ask patients to eat a regular diet as long as the child drinks extra fluids to make up for fluids lost from diarrhea.

How do I know if my child is dehydrated?

To check for dehydration, look for these signs:

- Sunken eyes
- Sunken soft spot 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.

A child who has diarrhea or is tested for the norovirus or rotavirus 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. Families and visitors might need to wear gloves and gowns, so you should check with your child’s nurse.

Everyone should wash their hands when they leave. Your child cannot leave the room as long they have diarrhea symptoms because this infection can spread to other patients. People are able to spread the disease until the diarrhea stops.

In the hospital, your child will receive fluids until the intestines work normally. Your child may be allowed to eat only clear liquids or may have an IV (small tube that goes into the vein) to replace fluids. Anti-diarrhea medicines are often not recommended, as they can hide signs 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 they can drink fluids without increasing bowel movements. It's also important that your child can take in more than they lose with diarrhea.

What if I have more questions?

If you have more questions, ask the doctors and nurses during your hospital stay. They want to make you feel as comfortable as possible.

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