

Pediatric Health Care

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Gastroenteritis (Stomach Bug)

Acute gastroenteritis is a syndrome often defined by increased stool frequency (eg, ≥ 3 loose or watery stools in 24 hours or a number of loose/watery bowel movements that exceeds the child's usual number of daily bowel movements by two or more), with or without vomiting. It typically lasts less than one week.

The most common causes of gastroenteritis include rotavirus and norovirus. Your child typically receives three doses of the rotavirus vaccination while they are an infant. Norovirus gastroenteritis occurs in people of all ages. It occurs year-round, with a peak in the fall and winter. Norovirus is highly contagious and the leading cause of stomach bug outbreaks.

The illness generally begins 12 hours to 5 days after exposure and lasts for three to seven days. The stomach bug usually presents as diarrhea, vomiting, fever, headache, abdominal cramps, and aches.

You should call the office if:

- Your child is under 6 months old, or under 18 pounds
- Your child experiences diarrhea for longer than seven days
- Your child is unable to drink enough fluid to balance fluid lost from vomit or diarrhea
- Your child has not peed in longer than 8 hours, or does not have tears when crying (infants)
- Your child has an underlying condition that complicates treatment (e.g. diabetes or other metabolic diseases)
- You have any additional questions

Treatment

Treatment is typically symptom based, and focused on making your child comfortable until they begin to recover. We recommend having your child rest, and making sure they are having enough fluids to compensate for any fluid lost while sick. One such way is offering small drinks of Pedialyte, or Pedialyte “popsicles” (made in an ice cube tray) to ensure they are having enough fluids. It is common for children to have little or no appetite during a vomiting illness, though children can continue to eat if desired. We’d recommend very basic foods (such as bananas, rice, applesauce or toast) if your child is beginning to feel hungry.

You should NOT give your child medicines to stop diarrhea (anti-diarrhea medicines). These medicines can make the infection last longer. Non-prescription treatments and over the counter medications for nausea or vomiting are not recommended for infants or children.

Preventing Spread

If your child is vomiting, you need to be careful to avoid spreading the infection to yourself, your family, and friends. Wash your hands frequently and keep sick children out of school or daycare. Children with vomiting (two or more times in 24 hours) that is caused by a contagious condition should be kept out of school or daycare until they have not vomited for 24 hours.

After throwing up or having diarrhea, immediately clean and disinfect the affected surfaces. We recommend products with a chlorine-bleach solution (like Clorox), as it is the most efficacious against norovirus. You should immediately wash any linens or clothes that may be contaminated with vomit or stool.