

## Gastroenteritis in babies and children

### What is gastroenteritis?

Gastroenteritis is a bowel infection, which causes diarrhoea (runny bowel motions) and sometimes vomiting. It is caused by a variety of viruses and bacteria. Diarrhoea can last up to 10 days but the vomiting usually settles quickly.

### How do you stop it spreading?

Gastroenteritis is very easy to spread.

Prevent it spreading to others by:

- Good handwashing. Wash hands after toileting and before eating. Also after changing nappies, before preparing food, and after feeding.
- Keeping your child away from other children, including at childcare, as much as possible until the diarrhoea has stopped.

### Caring for your child with gastroenteritis

The main treatment is to make sure your child drinks fluids regularly. Babies under six months can become ill quickly, losing fluids due to vomiting and diarrhea.

### Warning: Young babies and children can become dehydrated within 12 hours.

## Fluids

- Give clear **diluted** fluids—see \*below.
- If breastfeeding, continue to do so, but more often. You can give clear fluids as well.
- If bottle feeding, give clear fluids for the first 12 hours then return to normal formula in smaller, more frequent amounts.
- If vomiting, give small amounts of clear fluids often, 3g 5 mls (1 teaspoon) every few minutes. As vomiting decreases give larger amounts, but not as frequently.
- Older children, give clear fluids, one cup (150-200 mls) for every big vomit or bout of diarrhoea.
- Continuing usual quantities of milk, if wanted by the child is OK.

### \*Clear Fluids

- Gastrolyte and pedialyte may be recommended to replace lost body sugars and salts.
- Diluted fruit juice / lemonade / sachet drinks - one cup to four cups of water or quarter cup of juice to one cup of water
- Water

## Food

Your child may refuse food at first. This is not a problem as long as clear fluids are taken. Continue food if your child wants to eat. Best foods are noodles, rice, potatoes, cooked root vegetables, bread and cereals. Avoid fatty foods. Return to normal diet within 24 hours of the diarrhoea starting.

## Rest

Your child will need more rest, so encourage this.

## Diarrhoea

Bottoms can become red and sore, so keep clean with warm water, dab (don't rub), dry and apply a barrier cream, e.g zinc and castor oil ointment or vasoline.

### See your doctor when your child

- Is unable to keep fluids down:
  - for eight hours - babies
  - for 24 hours - over 18 months
- Is not drinking and continues to have diarrhoea and vomiting.
- Develops stomach pain.
- Has blood in vomit or green/yellow stained vomit.
- Has blood in bowel motions.
- Shows signs of \*dehydration (see below).
- Does not improve after 12 hours (babies may need to be checked again after six hours).
- Or if you are worried for any reason.

### \*Signs of dehydration

- Dry mouth and tongue
- Decreased urine output (fewer wet nappies or going to the toilet less often).
- More sleepy than usual
- Sunken eyes
- Cold hands and feet

**Instructions for Patients**

Your child is mildly / moderately dehydrated.

Try to give .....mls of .....  
every hour for the next .....hours.

Then give .....mls for the next  
.....hours.

If not improved by .....  
phone..... or visit  
.....

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**24  
HOUR  
SURGERY**

