

# Gastroenteritis

Information for patients,  
parents and carers



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leeds children's  
hospital

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caring about children

Gastroenteritis is the medical name for a 'tummy bug', which causes diarrhoea and vomiting.

### What causes Gastroenteritis?

Gastroenteritis can be caused by several different viral germs, most commonly Rotavirus, but may also be caused by bacteria (for example, salmonella).

These germs cause irritation of the stomach lining, which may make your child vomit. Irritation of the bowel lining produces extra liquid, causing diarrhoea which sometimes leads to dehydration.

### What are the symptoms?

Nausea and vomiting, stomach pains and cramps, headache, fever, feeling tired, diarrhoea - often watery.

### How is it treated?

There is no medicine that will safely stop diarrhoea in children. The treatment of gastroenteritis is to let the body heal itself whilst making sure your child does not become dehydrated.

Some children will be given a special fluid to drink (Dioralyte) which contains different salts and sugar to help prevent dehydration. Occasionally some children require a drip into a vein to treat dehydration.

### What should I give my child to eat and drink?

Encourage your child to drink plenty. If you are given Dioralyte then use as directed by the hospital. Your child can eat their normal diet, breastfeeding babies should continue to be breast fed. You may notice your child's diarrhoea is worse after eating. This is natural because the bowel is still overactive and is not digesting everything.

*Avoid fruit juices and fizzy drinks until your child is completely better.*

### Is it infectious?

**Yes**, gastroenteritis is infectious. The most important way to prevent spreading the illness is by handwashing with soap and warm water, especially after taking your child to the toilet or changing their nappy, or preparing, serving or eating food.



Do not share towels. Soiled clothes or bed linen should be washed on a hot wash.

Do not send your child to school or childcare until 48 hours after the **last episode** of diarrhoea or vomiting.

No swimming in a pool for two weeks after the last episode of diarrhoea or vomiting.

## When to call your doctor or bring the child back to the accident and emergency department:

1. If the child has no energy and is tired all the time, or when the baby is sleeping more and is not eager, or waking for feeds.
2. If the child or baby is passing less urine than normal
3. If the child has a temperature.
4. If your child or baby continues to vomit despite being given small frequent drinks or feeds.
5. If you are worried.
6. If your child has very severe abdominal pain.
7. If your child has bilious (yellow or green) vomit.

## How long will my child be unwell for?

Diarrhoea usually lasts 5-7 days and in most cases it has stopped within two weeks.

Vomiting usually lasts 1-2 days at most it usually stops within three days.

If your child continues to have diarrhoea for more than two weeks or vomiting for more than three days please see your GP.