

Gastroenteritis

Information for patients,
parents and carers



leeds children's
hospital

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 called an oral rehydration solution (e.g. Dioralyte). These contain 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. As stated above, oral rehydration solution (ORS) may be advised.

This can be purchased over the counter at large supermarkets and pharmacies. Mixing the contents of the ORS with dilute squash (not "Sugar-free" squash) can help with the taste and help your child to drink more. An alternative that has been shown to be equally effective is diluted apple juice with 50% water and 50% apple juice. If you are breastfeeding this should continue. Smaller volumes of milk/formula/drinks more frequently may be beneficial, and the child's diarrhoea may be worse after eating. This is natural as the bowel is still overactive and not digesting as it normally would.

Children especially those that are weaning may not be interested in solid food which is normal as long as they are getting sufficient fluids and energy through their drinks

In the hospital your child may have been asked to perform a 'Fluid Challenge'. This can be done at home. 1ml of liquid per kilogram of weight every five minutes can be given syringe e.g one that may come with calpol. If your child vomits during this, contact 111 or your GP.

Avoid other 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 your baby or child has not had a wet nappy or passed urine for more than 12 hours.
3. If your child is under three months and has a temperature of 38°C or above, or over three months old and has a temperature over 39°C.
4. If your child or baby continues to vomit despite being given small frequent drinks or feeds.
5. If you are concerned your child is becoming more unwell.
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.