

Reducing the spread of gastroenteritis

What is gastroenteritis?

Gastroenteritis is a common condition that causes diarrhoea and vomiting. It can be caused by different bacteria or viruses. Common symptoms include diarrhoea, vomiting, abdominal pain and fever. It can also cause nausea, muscle aches and dehydration.

Gastroenteritis can be unpleasant but most people will recover within a week. However, some people may have a more serious illness. Vulnerable groups include young children, older adults and those with a weakened immune system.

What to do if you have gastroenteritis

There is no specific treatment for many causes of gastroenteritis. Things that can help ease symptoms include:

- drinking plenty of water to replace fluids lost by diarrhoea and vomiting;
- resting;
- trying to eat small amounts of plain food.

Always contact your GP if any of the following apply:

- your symptoms are severe or do not improve after a few days;
- you have a high temperature (fever) of 38°C (100.4°F) or over;
- you have symptoms of dehydration, such as sunken eyes and passing small quantities of dark, strong smelling urine;

- you have a baby with symptoms;
- you have an immune system that is not working properly.

Gastroenteritis is **very infectious** and can be spread easily to others. **Key steps you can take to prevent the spread of infection include:**

Hand washing is the single most important method of preventing and controlling the spread of infection. Hands should be washed thoroughly with warm running water and soap, particularly:

- before eating;
- before handling, preparing or serving food;
- after visiting the toilet;
- after attending to any person who has diarrhoea or vomiting;
- after changing a baby's nappy;
- after handling or washing soiled clothing or bedding;
- after cleaning a toilet, child's potty, or bathroom;
- after handling pets, including reptiles, or non-domestic animals.

Dry hands thoroughly after every wash either using disposable paper towels, or ensuring each person has their own towel. Hand washing should be supervised for young children and other people for who, hand washing may be difficult. Do not rely on alcohol hand gels, as they're not always effective.

Also:

- do not share towels with someone who has diarrhoea or vomiting;
- do not share, or allow children to share, a bath with someone with diarrhoea or vomiting;
- where possible, avoid close contact, including sexual contact, with someone with diarrhoea or vomiting;
- avoid preparing or handling food for other people until symptoms have resolved for at least 48 hours;
- stay away from work/school/childcare until 48 hours after you've stopped vomiting or having diarrhoea and comply with any additional exclusion recommended by the Environmental Health and/or Health Protection Teams;
- clean hard surfaces including toilet bowls, flush handles, taps and hand basins regularly with hot soapy water followed by a disinfectant/sanitiser;
- wash dirty clothes, bedding and towels on the hottest wash cycle possible and do not share towels or face flannels with someone who is infected.



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