



Management of gastroenteritis at home

Viral gastroenteritis

Viruses are a very infectious and frequent cause of diarrhoea and vomiting in the community and can be responsible for large outbreaks on cruise ships, schools, hospitals and aged care facilities. Common viral causes are rotaviruses, astroviruses, adenoviruses and noroviruses.

What are the signs/symptoms?

The main symptoms include diarrhoea, vomiting, nausea, abdominal cramping and fever lasting a couple of days.

How do I catch gastroenteritis?

Viruses are very infectious and can be easily spread from person to person on hands, contaminated food and surfaces. The infectious period is during the illness and for 48 hours following symptoms.

What is the treatment for gastroenteritis?

There are no specific medications for gastroenteritis rest and replacement of lost fluids is generally all that is needed. Drink plenty of clear fluids. Rehydration drinks are available from the chemist. Undiluted soft drinks or juices can increase diarrhoea and dehydration so if consuming these always dilute with equal parts water.

How do I look after someone with gastroenteritis at home?

If caring for someone with gastroenteritis symptoms it is very important to protect yourself. Wash your hands well and often especially if handling soiled items or before eating. This is very important for the whole family to prevent the virus spreading to others.

People with gastroenteritis should not attend work or school or prepare food until all symptoms are resolved. Discourage friends from visiting until there have been no symptoms for 48 hours.

Where possible use a separate bathroom for the ill person.

Seek medical advice if signs of dehydration are present such as thirst, dry mouth, feeling fatigued or faint and passing very little dark urine.

Also if there is a high fever, diarrhoea is bloody or the abdominal pain severe.

How do I clean and disinfect to prevent others getting sick?

Wash soiled clothes and linen with detergent and hot water on a long cycle.

Wash any soiled surfaces thoroughly with detergent then disinfect with a bleach solution. Pay particular attention to taps, door handles, toilet seat and lid, the flush button, shower chair toilet roll dispensers, light switches and horizontal surfaces. Leave for 10 minutes and then rinse and dry.

How Do I make a bleach solution?

To make a bleach solution for disinfection of surfaces in the household:

Add 10mls of bleach (4% sodium hypochlorite) to 400mls of water or 100mls to 4 litres of water. The bleach solution must be made up fresh every 24 hours as it loses its strength very quickly and easily. It is weakened by organic material, evaporation, heat and sunlight. Never mix the bleach with anything except fresh water. Other chemicals can react with bleach and release a toxic chlorine gas. Keep the solution away from children.

To clean up vomit, discard all uncovered food in vicinity. Wearing gloves soak up fluid with paper towel and place in plastic bag. Thoroughly clean area with detergent and water and disposable towel. Then thoroughly disinfect with the bleach solution. Seal plastic bag and place in rubbish bin. Remove gloves and thoroughly wash hands. Lid of the toilet should be closed before flushing to stop faecal aerosols being generated.

Note

Bleach can be damaging to furnishings and fabrics so steam cleaning is an alternative for soft furnishings. (Do not dry vacuum as this encourages aerosolation of viruses).

Key point to remember

Medicines to prevent vomiting or diarrhoea should not be given except where specifically advised by a doctor.

Who can I contact?

- Your local doctor
- For symptoms requiring emergency care, go to your nearest Emergency Department or phone 000 for Ambulance Service

Disclaimer: The information contained in the brochure is intended to support, not replace, discussion with your doctor or health care professionals.

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