



Countess of  
Chester Hospital  
NHS Foundation Trust

# Gastroenteritis in children

## Information for parents and carers



## **What is Gastroenteritis?**

Gastroenteritis is an infection of the stomach and digestive system. It is caused by germs that can be either bacterial or viral, however, viral gastroenteritis is the most common cause in the UK.

## **What are the symptoms of Gastroenteritis?**

Symptoms can range from a mild stomach upset for a day with some mild diarrhoea, to severe vomiting and diarrhoea that can last for several days and often longer. Pains in the stomach are common as well as high temperatures and headaches.

## **How long will the symptoms last?**

If vomiting occurs it usually lasts a day or so. Diarrhoea can last for several days or more and often continues after vomiting stops. Loose stools (bowel motions) can continue for a week or more before a normal pattern returns.

## **Do children or babies need to be admitted to hospital?**

Often children can be managed at home. Admission to hospital is sometimes needed if symptoms are severe or if complications develop. If your child or baby appears dehydrated and is unable to tolerate fluids they will need to be admitted to hospital so that fluids can be given through a drip.

## **What will happen if symptoms continue for a long time?**

Loose stools can continue for a week or even longer before they return to normal. As long as your child is drinking small amounts of fluid on a regular basis (or your baby is taking half their normal amount of amount of milk/fluid) and continues to pass urine they do not need to be admitted to hospital.

If symptoms are severe or continue for a long time then a doctor or nurse may ask for a sample of the diarrhoea to send to the lab to look for infecting germs. In rare cases antibiotics will be needed.

## How do you catch gastroenteritis?

Viruses are easily spread from one person to another by close contact. Sometimes it is caused by infected food (food poisoning). There are many types of bacteria that can cause food poisoning.

## How can Gastroenteritis be prevented?

Ensuring bottles are sterilised properly and washing your hands regularly can help to prevent infection. It is important children are taught to wash their hands.

Hands should always be washed;

- After changing nappies
- Before touching food
- After going to the toilet
- After gardening
- After playing with pets.

It is important that the towels used by a child with Gastroenteritis or the parent changing the nappy of a child with gastroenteritis are not shared with any other family member.

## Should children and babies eat and drink as normal?

It is important to give children and babies lots to drink to prevent dehydration.

### *Children*

Small amounts of food on a frequent basis should be offered. If children do not want to eat whilst they are unwell that is ok, drinks are most important and food can wait until their appetite returns. Soup, bread, pasta, rice and potatoes are best to start with.

### *Babies*

Babies who are bottle fed can still have their milk as normal. To ensure your baby takes at least half their normal daily amount of milk it is better to offer small amounts frequently. Babies who are breast fed, should be offered feeds more frequently. For babies who are weaned, small amounts of food on a frequent basis

should be offered. If babies who are on solids do not want to eat whilst they are unwell that is ok, drinks are most important and food can wait until their appetite returns.

### **What if my child vomits after drinking or eating?**

Even if children or babies vomit they should still be given their milk and/or sips of water or juice frequently, as some fluid will be absorbed. Ice-lollies are a useful source of extra fluid.

### **Are children and babies given any medicine to treat gastroenteritis?**

As viruses cause most cases of gastroenteritis, antibiotics are not effective as they only kill bacteria. Rehydration powder may be prescribed which is dissolved in drinks. The rehydration powder helps water to be absorbed better. They do not reduce diarrhoea but help to prevent or treat dehydration.

Paracetamol can be given to ease a high temperature or headache. Medications to

stop diarrhoea should not be given to babies as they are unsafe for them.

### **Are there any complications from gastroenteritis?**

Complications are uncommon but seek further medical advice if any of the following develop, or if any other symptoms occur that you are concerned about;

- Dehydration - symptoms of dehydration include; passing little urine, a dry mouth and tongue, drowsiness, pale mottled skin, cold hands and feet
- Blood in the diarrhoea
- If you are unable to settle your baby
- Drowsiness or confusion
- Infections caught abroad

### **When can my child return to nursery/school?**

Your child can return to nursery/school 48 hours after all symptoms have gone. However, your child should not swim in swimming pools until at least 2 weeks after the last episode of diarrhoea.

## **What should I do if I have any concerns after I take my child home?**

If you have any concerns after you have taken your child home, please contact your GP. If you are worried about your child's condition and consider it an emergency please call for an ambulance or take your child to the Accident and Emergency Department.

If your child was admitted to hospital and you require some advice within 24 hours of discharge please contact the children's ward.

### **Further information**

'Diarrhoea and vomiting in children under 5 - understanding NICE guidance'  
[www.nice.org.uk](http://www.nice.org.uk)

### **Contacts for advice**

Your GP or Nurse Practice.

Childrens Unit:  
01244 365074

Accident and Emergency  
Department:  
01244 365006



## If you require a special edition of this leaflet

This leaflet is available in large print, Braille, electronically and in other languages on request. Please contact the Patient Experience Team on:

Telephone 01244 366066 or

Email [coch.patientexperience@nhs.net](mailto:coch.patientexperience@nhs.net)

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若是你想索取這份傳單的中文譯本，請聯絡「病人預約中心」或向其中一名職員查詢。

Si vous voulez cette brochure en français, contactez le bureau des rendez-vous ou demandez à un membre du personnel.

यदि आप यह परचा हिन्दी में लेना चाहते हैं तो कृपया पेसेन्ट अॅपाइन्टमेन्ट सेन्टर से संपर्क करें या किसी स्टाफ से पूछें।

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