

# Gastroenteritis in Children

## Child Health Information

Gastroenteritis is an infection of the gut which causes diarrhoea, vomiting and tummy pain.

Viruses, particularly ones called 'rotavirus' and 'adenovirus', are the most common causes in children. Severe gastroenteritis can cause dehydration particularly in young children.

This leaflet gives advice about how to care for a child with gastroenteritis.



### Looking after a child with gastroenteritis

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- Continue with normal feeds/drinks including breast feeding
- Encourage fluid intake, offering frequent and small amounts
- If your child vomits wait 5-10mins before trying to give further fluids more slowly (this maybe via a spoon or a syringe if your child is too young to take sips)
- Avoid fizzy drinks, high energy drinks and undiluted fruit juices. Give milk, diluted juice or squash (preferably not diet or 'no added sugar' varieties)
- Do not stop your child from eating if they want to
- **Do not** give your child any anti-diarrhoea medications
- If your child is having a lot of diarrhoea an oral rehydration solution (ORS) may be recommended e.g. Dioralyte®
- Painkillers such as paracetamol can be given for tummy pain
- If your child has blood in their poo or has constant tummy pain talk to your GP or call NHS 111 for advice.

### Dehydration

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Most children with gastroenteritis get better with care at home but some children, particularly young babies with severe diarrhoea and vomiting, can become dehydrated.

Signs of **dehydration** to look for include:

- Dry mouth, tongue or lips
- Reduced number of wet nappies/passing less urine
- Sunken eyes
- Being unusually sleepy or irritable
- Cold hands and feet, mottled skin.

Children who are dehydrated should be discussed with a health professional e.g. GP, health visitor or NHS 111 for further advice.

## Treatment of dehydration

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Children with dehydration can be treated with '**oral rehydration solution**' (**ORS**) such as Dioralyte® or other brands. This can be bought in pharmacies, supermarkets or on prescription. ORS treatment can be given at home if your child is not too unwell. ORS can also be used if children have severe gastroenteritis to stop them getting dehydrated.

Make up ORS as directed on the packet and give small amounts frequently (eg every 5-10 minutes). A small amount of squash can be added to improve the taste. Many children vomit a little when they start the ORS but you should continue to give it.

If your child will not take the ORS or if they continue to have a lot of vomiting they may need to be seen in hospital. Sometimes ORS may be given by a tube from the nose into the stomach (nasogastric tube) and occasionally fluids have to be given into a vein (a drip or 'IV').

## Prevention of spread:

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Gastroenteritis is easily spread from one person to another

- Wash your hands (and your child's) with soap and water after going to the toilet, changing nappies and before eating
- Regularly clean the toilet at home with disinfectant/bleach
- Do not share towels, flannels etc with your child
- Wash soiled clothes separately- soiled clothing and bedding should be washed at high temperatures (60°)
- Keep children off school, playgroup etc until **at least 48 hours** after their last symptom
- Your child should not use swimming pools for another two weeks after they are well.

**Diarrhoea commonly lasts 5-7 days and usually stops within two weeks**

**Vomiting commonly lasts 1-2 days and usually stops within three days**

## Further information

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Your GP, hospital doctor or health visitor will be happy to give further advice.  
NHS Choices website: [www.nhs.uk/conditions](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions)

NICE clinical guideline no 84 [www.nice.org.uk](http://www.nice.org.uk)