NHS
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A guide to...

Diarrhoea and/or Vomiting (Gastroenteritis)

Patient Information

Children's Emergency Department (CED)

Watford General Hospital



What is gastroenteritis?

Diarrhoea and vomiting is usually caused by an infection — we call this gastroenteritis.

In most cases, there is no specific treatment, and it gets better by itself within 24-48 hours. Whilst the symptoms continue, it is important to make sure that your child does not become dehydrated. You should also be aware of changes to look out for that would mean you need to seek further help.

What is dehydration?

Dehydration occurs when the body does not have enough water to carry out it's normal functions. If severe enough, it can cause the loss of important salts in the body and become dangerous.

Those at most risk of dehydration include young babies, children who have not been able to drink enough during the course of illness and those experiencing severe or prolonged symptoms.

Most children will not become dehydrated.

How can you tell if your child is seriously dehydrated?

Dry lips are a normal sign of reduced fluid intake, however if your child develops any of the following then seek help:

- Being unusually irritable or lethargic
- Passing much less urine than normal
- Pale or mottled skin
- Cold hands and feet
- Very dry skin, sunken eyes
- Unable to cry tears

How to prevent dehydration

- In breast or formula fed babies, offer feeds as normal
- Encourage small frequent additional fluids
- If they are frequently being sick, give a short period of rest and then offer small amounts (by spoon or syringe). Fizzy drinks are not recommended.
- Diluted apple juice or oral rehydration solution (ORS) like Dioralyte are recommended

How to treat mild dehydration at home?

- Give oral rehydration solution (ORS) such as Dioralyte (always follow the packet instructions)
- Give small frequent drinks or either ORS or diluted apple juice
- Do not offer solid food until vomiting has stopped and your child is tolerating their fluids.

Caring fo your child after rehydration

- During a period of gastroenteritis, your child may lose weight
- It is important that your child builds up their food intake slowly—start with plain, simple foods.
- Your child should then be encouraged to drink plenty of their usual fluids with the exception of fizzy drinks.
- If your child is continuing to have diarrhoea, which is common after the vomiting has stopped, then you can give ORS after each episode.

How long will my child be ill?

Diarrhoea often lasts five to seven days but can take up to 14 days to stop. In some cases, it can take a few months for your child's poo to return completely to normal. Vomiting generally lasts one to two days. If your child's symptoms are going on longer, contact your GP for review.

Red flag signs

In most cases, these illnesses are short lived however very occasionally there may be other issues. Please seek immediate help if your child:

- Develops high fever and rigors (shakes) - especially if only vomiting
- Severe tummy ache
- A large swollen tummy that is painful to touch
- Green vomit
- Blood in their poo
- Fits
- Severe headache, irritability or difficult to wake up.

How can I stop is spreading?

Gastroenteritis is very contagious. To help stop the spread:

- Handwashing is the best way—everyone in the home should wash their hands frequently with soap in warm running water, and dry them carefully.
- Always wash hands after going to the toilet, changing nappies, before touching food.
- Clean surfaces regularly, including inanimate objects like door handles, light switches, toys, smart phones / tablets, remote controls etc—bugs can live on these for a long time!
- Do not share towels
- Your child must not return to school or any other childcare facility until there has been **48 hours since the last episode of diarrhoea or vomiting**
- Your child must not swim in a swimming pool until two weeks after the diarrhoea has stopped.

If you need this leaflet in another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call **01923 217 187** or email **westherts.pals@nhs.uk**



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