

Diarrhoea or vomiting (gastroenteritis)

Gastroenteritis (or 'gastro') is a viral or bacterial infection that causes inflammation of the digestive system. It can cause diarrhoea, vomiting or stomach cramps. The symptoms can range from mild to severe and usually last for a few days. Gastroenteritis can cause dehydration because of the large amount of fluid lost through vomiting or diarrhoea.

Gastroenteritis can have various causes. If there is a specific diagnosis following gastro symptoms, follow the fact sheet for that disease:

- *Campylobacter* infection
- Cryptosporidiosis
- *Giardia* infection (giardiasis)
- Rotavirus infection
- *Salmonella* infection (salmonellosis)
- *Shigella* infection (shigellosis).

How it spreads

The disease spreads when germs enter the body. This can happen when people:

- inhale droplets produced when an infected person vomits
- touch contaminated surfaces and then touch their mouth, nose or eyes
- eat contaminated food.

Surfaces and food can become contaminated when:

- infected droplets are spread onto surfaces when an infected person vomits
- infected people do not wash their hands well after using the toilet and their hands contaminate food or surfaces
- people do not wash their hands well after changing the nappy of an infected baby and their hands contaminate food or surfaces.

People are infectious for as long as the germs are present in their faeces (poo).

Exclusion period

Exclude until there has not been any diarrhoea or vomiting for at least 24 hours.

If the diarrhoea or vomiting are confirmed to be due to norovirus, exclude for at least 48 hours.

Staff with these symptoms should not handle food until they have not vomited or had diarrhoea for at least 48 hours (they can be assigned to other duties after at least 24 hours or stay away from the service).

Some states and territories may have different requirements for gastroenteritis (diarrhoea or vomiting). Check if your state or territory has different requirements for gastroenteritis.

Actions for educators and other staff

Follow the exclusion period in the *Staying healthy* guidelines.

If you have 2 or more cases of gastroenteritis in your service, contact your local public health unit for advice. This is legally required in most states and territories (except South Australia).

Ensure staff and children have good hand hygiene.

Ensure staff use appropriate cleaning practices, as described in the *Staying healthy* guidelines.

Actions for parents and carers

Keep your child at home until they feel well and there has been no diarrhoea for at least 24 hours, or for at least 48 hours if they have norovirus.

Give your child plenty of fluids and talk to your pharmacist about rehydration solution options.

See a doctor immediately if your child cannot keep down any fluids. Babies under 6 months should always be seen by a doctor if they have gastro.

If the local public health unit finds that the service has an outbreak of gastroenteritis, follow the directions for exclusion provided by the unit.

Encourage your child to wash their hands regularly.

More information about gastroenteritis

See healthdirect for more information on prevention, diagnosis and treatment of gastroenteritis (healthdirect.gov.au/gastroenteritis).

To find out if a child needs medical help:

- use the online symptom checker (healthdirect.gov.au/symptom-checker)
- speak to a registered nurse by calling the 24-hour health advice hotline on 1800 022 222.