

Gastroenteritis

Is an illness of the digestive system or gut. Usually it will heal itself within a few days. The main complication of Gastroenteritis also called gastro, is dehydration due to loss of fluid through vomiting and diarrhoea. This can be prevented by keeping up oral fluids (drinking). Rarely do people need intravenous fluid replacement (through a 'Drip').

Symptoms:

- Loss of appetite
- Bloating
- Nausea (feeling like you want to vomit)
- Vomiting
- Abdominal cramps/pains (tummy pains)
- Diarrhoea (watery poo)
- In some cases there may be blood or pus in the stool (poo)

Causes:

- Micro organisms (bugs)
- Chemicals (ie lead)
- Medication (ie antibiotics)

Infectious Gastroenteritis:

Infection occurs when the infectious agent (bug) is ingested usually through eating or drinking. There are many different organisms which can cause gastroenteritis.

Treatment:

- Plenty of fluids – water is best
- Oral rehydration drinks such as 'gastrolyte'
- Rest
- If severe admission to hospital for intravenous fluid replacement
- Avoid anti-vomiting or anti-diarrhoea drugs unless prescribed as these medications keep the infection inside your body

Prevention:

- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water after going to the toilet, changing nappies, smoking, nose blowing or handling animals.
- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water before preparing food or eating.
- Use disposable towel to dry your hands. Bugs can survive on cloth towels for some time.
- Do not handle raw and cooked food with the same implements. Wash thoroughly between uses
- Keep all kitchen surfaces clean
- Keep cold food below 5°C and hot food above 60°C to reduce the growth of bacteria.
- Make sure foods are thoroughly cooked.
- Clean toilet and bathrooms regularly especially door handles, toilet seats and taps.
- Clean baby change tables regularly

Gastroenteritis and school:

- Children must be kept at home until they have been symptom free for twenty four hours.
- Let the school know if your child has gastroenteritis so we can be aware of implementing precautions in particular classrooms.

Reference: Better Health Channel fact sheet