



## **VIRAL GASTROENTERITIS**

### **FULL FACT SHEET**

#### **What are the symptoms?**

The main symptoms are vomiting and watery diarrhoea. Other symptoms may include nausea, fever, abdominal pain, headache, and muscle aches. Dehydration can follow. Symptoms can take between one and three days to develop and usually last between one and two days, sometimes longer.

#### **How is it spread?**

Viral gastroenteritis is highly infectious and is spread by the vomit or faeces of an infected person through:

- person-to-person contact, for example shaking hands with someone who has been sick and has the virus on their hands
- contaminated objects
- contaminated food or drink

Infection may also be spread through aerosolised particles when people vomit. In most cases, spread occurs from a person who has symptoms. Some people can pass on the infection without symptoms, particularly in the first 48 hours after recovery.

#### **Who is at risk?**

Viral gastroenteritis can affect people of all ages.

#### **How is it prevented?**

After using the toilet, changing nappies, and before eating or preparing food, wash your hands thoroughly with soap and running water for at least 10 seconds and dry them with a clean towel. **Avoid multiple person/shared use towels.**

#### **How is it diagnosed?**

A diagnosis of viral gastroenteritis is usually based on the person's symptoms.

#### **How is it treated?**

There is no specific treatment for viral gastroenteritis except rest and drinking plenty of fluids. Most people will recover without complications. However, viral gastroenteritis can be serious for infants, people with suppressed immune systems and the elderly.

People with vomiting or diarrhoea should:

- Rest at home and not attend work while sick. Infants and children attending childcare or school should be **excluded from attending for 48 hours** after the symptoms have stopped
- Not prepare food for others or care for patients, children, or the elderly. These precautions should continue until 48 hours after diarrhoea or vomiting stops. This includes people who prepare food in the home or working in the food industry.
- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and running water for 10 seconds after using the toilet
- Drink plenty of clear fluids, for example juice or soft drink diluted 1 part to 4 parts water, to prevent dehydration. **Avoid** undiluted fruit juice and soft drinks as they may increase dehydration and diarrhoea. Rehydration drinks that replace fluids and salts are available from the pharmacy/shops. Intravenous fluids may be needed in severe cases of dehydration.

People caring for those with gastroenteritis should wash hands thoroughly with soap and running water after any contact with the sick person. Cleaning soiled surfaces and clothing reduces further spread of the virus.

When cleaning up vomit or faeces:

- Wear gloves
- Wash hands with soap and running water for 10 seconds after gloves are removed and disposed
- Use disposable paper towels or rags to remove any solid material and seal them in a plastic bag before placing in the rubbish bin
- Clean any soiled object or surface with hot water and detergent and allow to dry thoroughly
- Some people also recommend wearing a mask.

**Get medical advice if:**

- You have symptoms of severe dehydration, such as persistent dizziness, only passing small amounts of urine or no urine at all, or if you're losing consciousness
- You have bloody diarrhoea
- You have severe constant abdominal pain
- You're vomiting constantly and are unable to keep down any fluids
- You have a fever over 38C (100.4F)
- Your symptoms haven't started to improve after a few days
- In the last few weeks you've returned from a part of the world with poor sanitation
- You have a serious underlying condition, such as kidney disease, inflammatory bowel disease or a weak immune system, and have diarrhoea and vomiting

Your Doctor may suggest sending off a sample of your stool to a laboratory to check what's causing your symptoms. Antibiotics may be prescribed if this shows you have a bacterial infection

### **The 'Simple Solution' - Homemade Oral Rehydration Salts (ORS) Recipe**

1. Six level teaspoons of sugar
2. Half level teaspoon of salt.
3. One litre of clean drinking or boiled water and then cooled - five cupfuls (each cup about 200 mls).

**SHG**

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