



Fact Sheet: Viral Gastroenteritis

What is viral gastroenteritis?

Gastroenteritis means inflammation of the stomach, small and large intestines. Viral gastroenteritis is an infection caused by a virus that leads to vomiting and/or diarrhea. It is often called the “stomach flu”. Many different viruses can cause viral gastroenteritis, such as rotaviruses, adenoviruses, and Noroviruses.

What are the symptoms?

- Watery diarrhea
- Nausea and vomiting
- Headache
- Low fever
- Stomach ache

Symptoms usually start 1 to 2 days after infection with a virus and last 1 to 10 days.

How is it spread?

The viruses are spread through close contact with infected persons by fecal – oral route. This means that you must get something in your mouth that is contaminated with feces from an infected person. It can also be spread through air droplets.

How is it treated?

- Prevent severe loss of body fluids (dehydration).
- For children, an oral rehydration fluid such as Pedialyte, Ceralyte, or Oralyte can be used.
- Adults should drink clear liquids and avoid alcoholic and caffeinated beverages.

For most persons, viral gastroenteritis is not a serious disease and people almost always recover completely. Children, the elderly, and those with a poor immune system are the most likely to get severely dehydrated.

How is it prevented?

- Frequent hand washing
- Proper food storage and preparation
- Don't make food for others if you are ill
- Cleaning contaminated surfaces with a detergent in hot water followed by a bleach solution (tablespoon bleach to ½ cup of water)
- Prompt washing of soiled clothing

This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be used for self -diagnosis or as a substitute consultation with a health care provider. For more information, call your health care provider.

Visit our website at www.gchd.us or the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention at www.cdc.gov

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