

Gastroenteritis

FACT SHEET

What is gastroenteritis?

Sometimes called the “stomach flu,” gastroenteritis is inflammation of the stomach and intestine caused by a virus. Many viruses can cause gastroenteritis, the most common is Norovirus.

What are the symptoms of gastroenteritis?

The most common symptoms of gastroenteritis are watery diarrhea and vomiting. The affected person may also develop a headache, fever, and abdominal cramps.

Symptoms usually develop in 1 to 2 days after exposure to the virus and may last for 1 to 10 days, depending on which virus causes the illness.

How are the viruses that cause gastroenteritis spread?

The viruses that cause gastroenteritis are spread from person to person through close contact with infected persons (for example, by sharing food, water or eating utensils). People are also infected by eating or drinking contaminated foods or beverages. Food may become contaminated when it is prepared by a person that has gastroenteritis, especially if they do not wash their hands regularly after using the bathroom. Drinking water that is contaminated by sewage may be a source of spread of the viruses.

How is gastroenteritis treated?

The most important part of treating gastroenteritis in children and adults is to prevent severe loss of fluids (dehydration) by consuming fluids. The CDC recommends that families with infants and young children keep a supply of oral rehydration solution (ORS) at home at all times and use the solution when diarrhea first occurs in a child. ORS is available at pharmacies without a prescription. Follow directions on the ORS package and use clean or boiled water. Medication, including antibiotics (which have no effect on viruses) and other treatments should be avoided unless specifically recommended by a physician.

What can be done to prevent the spread of gastroenteritis?

- Wash your hands carefully with soap after using the toilet and before preparing or handling food, especially if you have diarrhea.
- Promptly wipe surfaces that have been contaminated with diarrhea or vomit with household bleach-based cleaners.
- Promptly wash any soiled articles of clothing.

How can I get more information about gastroenteritis?

Contact the East Metro Health District, which services Gwinnett, Newton and Rockdale Counties, at (770) 339- 4260 or visit the following web sites:

- CDC Gastroenteritis fact sheet - www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/revb/gastro/faq.htm