

VIRAL GASTROENTERITIS FACT SHEETS

Florida Department of Health in Charlotte County

Contact Epidemiology

Phone: (941) 624-7236

Fax: (941) 624-7277

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Patient / Family Fact Sheet

What is viral gastroenteritis?

Gastroenteritis means inflammation of the stomach and small and large intestines. Viral gastroenteritis is an infection caused by a variety of viruses that results in vomiting or diarrhea. It is often called the "stomach flu," although it is not caused by the influenza viruses.

What causes viral gastroenteritis?

Many different viruses can cause gastroenteritis, including rotaviruses, adenoviruses, caliciviruses, astroviruses, Norwalk virus, and a group of Norwalk-like viruses. Viral gastroenteritis is not caused by bacteria (such as *Salmonella* or *Escherichia coli*) or parasites (such as *Giardia*), or by medications or other medical conditions, although the symptoms may be similar. Your doctor can determine if the diarrhea is caused by a virus or by something else.

What are the symptoms of viral gastroenteritis?

The main symptoms of viral gastroenteritis are watery diarrhea and vomiting. The affected person may also have headache, fever, and abdominal cramps ("stomach ache"). In general, the symptoms begin 1 to 2 days following infection with a virus that causes gastroenteritis and may last for 1 to 10 days, depending on which virus causes the illness.

Is viral gastroenteritis a serious illness?

For most people, it is not. People who get viral gastroenteritis almost always recover completely without any long-term problems. Gastroenteritis is a serious illness, however, for persons who are unable to drink enough fluids to replace what they lose through vomiting or diarrhea. Infants, young children, and persons who are unable to care for themselves, such as the disabled or elderly, are at risk for dehydration from loss of fluids. Immune compromised persons are at risk for dehydration because they may get a more serious illness, with greater vomiting or diarrhea. They may need to be hospitalized for treatment to correct or prevent dehydration.

Is the illness contagious? How are these viruses spread?

Yes, viral gastroenteritis is contagious. The viruses that cause gastroenteritis are spread through close contact with infected persons (for example, by sharing food, water, or eating utensils). Individuals may also become infected by eating or drinking contaminated foods or beverages.

How does food get contaminated by gastroenteritis viruses?

Food may be contaminated by food preparers or handlers who have viral gastroenteritis, especially if they do not wash their hands regularly after using the bathroom. Shellfish may be contaminated by sewage, and persons who eat raw or undercooked shellfish harvested from contaminated waters may get diarrhea. Drinking water can also be contaminated by sewage and be a source of spread of these viruses.

Where and when does viral gastroenteritis occur?

Viral gastroenteritis affects people in all parts of the world. Each virus has its own seasonal activity. For example, in the United States, rotavirus and astrovirus infections occur during the cooler months of the year (October to April), whereas adenovirus infections occur throughout the year. Viral gastroenteritis outbreaks can occur in institutional settings, such as schools, child care facilities, and nursing homes, and can occur in other group settings, such as banquet halls, cruise ships, dormitories, and campgrounds.

Who gets viral gastroenteritis?

Anyone can get it. Viral gastroenteritis occurs in people of all ages and backgrounds. However, some viruses tend to cause diarrheal disease primarily among people in specific age groups. Rotavirus infection is the most common cause of diarrhea in infants and young children under 5 years old. Adenoviruses and astroviruses cause diarrhea mostly in young children, but older children and adults can also be affected. Norwalk and Norwalk-like viruses are more likely to cause diarrhea in older children and adults.

How is viral gastroenteritis diagnosed?

Generally, viral gastroenteritis is diagnosed by a physician on the basis of the symptoms and medical examination of the patient. Rotavirus infection can be diagnosed by laboratory testing of a stool specimen. Tests to detect other viruses that cause gastroenteritis are not in routine use.

How is viral gastroenteritis treated?

The most important of treating viral gastroenteritis in children and adults is to prevent severe loss of fluids (dehydration). This treatment should begin at home. Your physician may give you specific instructions about what kinds of fluid to give. 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 the child. ORS is available at pharmacies without a prescription. Follow the written directions on the ORS package, and use clean or boiled water. Medications, including antibiotics (which have no effect on viruses) and other treatments, should be avoided unless specifically recommended by a physician.

Can viral gastroenteritis be prevented?

Yes. Persons can reduce their chance of getting infected by frequent handwashing, prompt disinfection of contaminated surfaces with household chlorine bleach-based cleaners, and prompt washing of soiled articles of clothing. If food or water is thought to be contaminated, it should be avoided.

Norwalk and Norovirus Medical Staff Fact Sheet

Family of SRSV calicivirus that include Norwalk, Norovirus, Taunton Virus, and Snow Mountain Virus

(RSRV = small, round, structured virus).

There are at least 11 other related viruses.

Invade the Small Intestine with small infective dose (10 particles)

Humans the only known reservoir

Incubation 24 – 48 hours

The virus is present in the stool of infected people.

30% of Norovirus infections may be asymptomatic.

It is transmitted when hands are not washed thoroughly after having a bowel movement (Fecal-Oral).

Symptoms

- Nausea - Cramps

- Diarrhea (more common in older people)

- Vomiting (more common in younger people)

- Low-grade fever

Duration 24 – 48 hours

Usually mild and self-limiting

More severe illness in the elderly

Affects all age groups and both sexes

Leading cause of viral gastroenteritis – 180,000 cases/yr in U.S.

More than 60% of the U.S. population is exposed to the virus by age 50.

Occurrence year round

Transmission

- Person to person - Airborne – Fomites - Food – Water – Ice

- Transmission possible 24 hours before and 48 hours after symptoms

Controlling outbreaks

- Exclusion of ill staff

- Cohorting of ill patients

- Restriction of visiting, group activities

- Suspension of admissions and transfers

- Disinfections of common areas

- Use of personal protective clothing (gloves, masks, Etc.)

- Hand washing between patient contacts (even when using gloves)

Standard hospital laboratories and commercial laboratories usually are not equipped to detect this virus.

State laboratories do most of the testing for identification.

Immunity is believed to last around 14 days – long term immunity may not occur.

Detecting antibody in the blood does not assure a person is immune.

NORWALK VIRUS

PREVENTION STEPS

CONTINUE STEPS TILL THERE ARE NO NEW CASES for 48 hours

- **NO NEW ADMISSIONS**
- **CLOSE DINNING ROOM AND SERVE MEALS IN RESIDENTS ROOMS**
- **COHORT ILL RESIDENTS IF POSSIBLE**
- **RESTRICT PERSON TO PERSON CONTACT**
- **STOP GROUP ACTIVITIES**
- **RESTRICT VISITORS TO ILL RESIDENTS
(VISITOR NEED TO BE AWARE OF PREVENTION STEPS)**
- **HOUSE KEEPING TO USE MASKS**
- **NURSING STAFF SHOULD USE MASKS / GLOVES WITH BODY FLUIDS**
- **MINIMIZE STAFF FLOATING**
- **EMS TO USE MASKS WHEN PICKING UP RESIDENTS WITH GI SYMPTOMS**
- **GOOD HAND WASHING**
- **EXPECT RELAPSING +/- ONE WEEK**

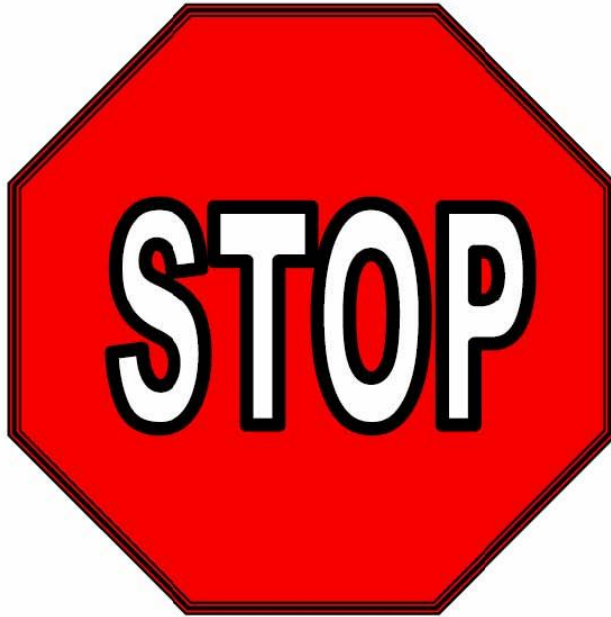


ATTENTION VISITORS!!!

We presently have a number of ill residents. Please wash your hands before visiting and before leaving. You may wish to reconsider visiting at this time.

If you have any questions please contact either the Administrator _____ or the Director of Nursing _____.

Thank you



Hand washing is the single most important practice to prevent the spread of outbreaks!

HANDS MUST BE WASHED:

- . Whenever they are visibly soiled or there has been contact with stool.
- . Between contact with different residents.
- . Before putting on gloves *and* after removing gloves.
- . After using the toilet.
- . Before eating or smoking.
- . Before handling or preparing food.

A PROPER HAND WASH INCLUDES:

- . Using warm running water and soap with plenty of friction for 30 seconds.
- . Using a clean paper towel to dry your hands and to turn off the tap.

Use of a waterless hand sanitizer may be substituted for handwashing if adequate sink facilities are not immediately accessible and hands are not visibly soiled.

Stool Samples

- **Please order Stool samples for**
 - **Stool Cultures**
 - **Stool for Ova and Parasites**
 - **Stool for viral Noro-like-virus**

- **Collect as much as liquid stool as possible per specimen in a sterile clean container**

- **Keep cool but not frozen**

- **If you want to samples send them to the State Laboratory please request state laboratory request slips by calling our office at (941) 624-7236**