

What is diarrhoea and vomiting?

Diarrhoea and vomiting are common in adults, children and babies.

When you have diarrhoea your bowel movements (poo) are loose or watery and you may need to go to the toilet more often than usual.

Vomiting and diarrhoea can happen on their own or together. When vomiting and diarrhoea are caused by an infection it is called gastroenteritis.



What infections cause vomiting and diarrhoea (or gastroenteritis)?

- Bacteria such as *E.coli*, *Salmonella* and *Campylobacter*
- Viruses like the “winter vomiting bug”
- Other germs such as *Cryptosporidium* and *Giardia*

How does gastroenteritis spread?

The germs which cause acute infectious diarrhoea usually have to be swallowed to cause infection. This can happen when germs get onto your hands after caring for someone with diarrhoea or after touching surfaces that have been contaminated, like toilet flush handles, toilet door handles and toilet seats. Once the germs are on your hands it is easy for them to get into your mouth. If germs get onto food they may multiply which can lead to large numbers of people becoming ill.

Treatment of gastroenteritis

Most adults and children with gastroenteritis can be treated at home.

The most important thing is to make sure you or your child are drinking enough fluids. It is very important to replace the fluids lost from vomiting or diarrhoea. This will stop dehydration (your body being dangerously low on fluids).

If your baby is under 6 months:

- get medical advice from your GP or practice nurse
- offer your baby their usual breastfeeds or formula feeds
- you might need to give them smaller feeds more often if they are feeling sick

For older children and adults:

- chat to your pharmacist about oral rehydration solutions which can be a handy way of replacing the fluids lost from diarrhoea
- give children and adults small amounts of fluid often

When they are unwell, they might not feel like eating, this is okay once they are drinking fluids. If you or your child are uncomfortable with a high temperature, paracetamol can help. Speak to your pharmacist first and always read the label.

Get medical help from your GP if:

- you or someone you are caring for is passing less urine than normal
- you or someone you are caring for is listless or feeling very weak
- there is blood in the diarrhoea or vomit
- there is bad tummy pain
- you or someone you are caring for is on regular medication that they cannot take

Prevent the spread of diarrhoea and vomiting sickness

People with diarrhoea or vomiting need to keep away from others until at least 48 hours have passed since they last vomited or had diarrhoea. This also means that:

- Children **must not** go to childcare, crèche or school until at least 48 hours **after** they last vomited or had diarrhoea
- Health care workers, child care workers and food handlers **must not** attend work until at least 48 hours **after** they last vomited or had diarrhoea
- If you have VTEC (verotoxin producing E.coli), often called STEC, you may have to stay away from work or childcare for a longer period. Your Department of Public Health will give you advice

Good hand and food hygiene is very important.

Hand hygiene

Wash hands fully and often with soap and warm water and especially:

Before *and* after:

- * preparing, serving or eating food
- * dealing with sick people
- * changing a nappy
- * treating a cut or a wound

After:

- * going or bringing someone to the toilet
- * blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing
- * handling rubbish or bins
- * handling an animal or animal litter, droppings, toys, and bowls
- * being on the farm

Teach your children how and when to wash their hands.

Food hygiene

When you have diarrhoea or vomiting it is very easy to spread germs that can cause other people to be sick. So try not to prepare food for other people, especially raw food such as salads.

Do not change a baby's nappy where you prepare or eat food.

Cleaning up diarrhoea or vomit

1. Protect yourself by wearing rubber gloves and, if available, a plastic disposable apron.
2. Soak up excess liquid with paper towels or tissues to keep the area of contamination as small as possible.
3. When you have removed as much vomit and diarrhoea as possible, wash the area fully with detergent (cleaning liquid) and hot water.
4. Once the area is cleaned, rinse it with clean water and let it dry.
5. Clean hard surfaces, like the bath and door handles. A bathroom cleaner is ideal for this.
6. Dump the plastic apron in the dustbin when you have finished cleaning.
7. Wash any equipment used (including your gloves) in detergent and water and allow to dry thoroughly.
8. Carefully wash and dry your hands.

Further information:

There is useful information in the following Department of Public Health factsheets:

- ◇ Washing your hands
- ◇ VTEC/STEC on the farm
- ◇ Handling food and cleaning
- ◇ Verotoxin-producing E.coli (VTEC, often called STEC)
- ◇ Could your well make you unwell?



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