

Patient Information

Gastroenteritis

Children's Services



Introduction

The purpose of this leaflet is to explain the management of a child with gastroenteritis.

What causes gastroenteritis?

Many different bacteria and viruses (bugs) can cause this infection. Gastroenteritis may be spread through contaminated water or food and by poor hygiene.

Prevention

Good hygiene helps to prevent gastroenteritis. Washing hands with soap and water is more effective than using alcohol gel. However, alcohol gel is better than nothing i.e. on days out!

- Ensure that hands are washed after using the toilet and before preparing food.
- Teach your children to wash their hands before meals and after playing in the garden or with pets.
- For all babies less than one year of age, bottles, teats, cups and bowls should be sterilised after washing.
- Prepare food in a clean area.
- Wash hands between handling raw meat and ready cooked food.

- Ensure food is used or discarded by the “use by” date. Heat food thoroughly. Store left-over food covered in the fridge, but cool it first.
- Towels used by infected children should not be shared.

Symptoms

- Having diarrhoea, often with nausea and vomiting as well. Diarrhoea means that stools (poos) are loose and frequent, more than three times a day.
- Cramp type pains in the tummy are common. The pain may ease for a while each time when diarrhoea has been passed.
- Fever, with a temperature above 38°C.
- Feeling miserable, sleepy and not interested in normal activities.
- Your child may not be able to tolerate any solid food and/or fluids. This could lead to **dehydration**.

Dehydration

Your child may be dehydrated if he/she:

- Appears to get more unwell.
- Produces less urine.
- Has pale or mottled skin.
- Has cold limbs.

Children with diarrhoea or vomiting caused by gastroenteritis should not:

- Attend any school or other childcare facility.
- Return to school or other childcare facility until at least 48 hours after the last episode of diarrhoea and vomiting.
- Go swimming for two weeks after last episode of diarrhoea.

Treatment

The most important treatment is to avoid dehydration. Encourage your child to have any fluid that they will take in small frequent amounts. Avoid cow's milk and fizzy drinks.

If your child feels sick, still try to get them to drink small regular sips, or offer an ice lolly. If your child is under one year of age, try cooled boiled water. Do not stop breast feeding. Older children may tolerate water, blackcurrant or flat lemonade.

Your doctor may have advised you to use rehydration drinks which can be used in addition to, or instead of, normal drinks and help to restore the body's balance of salts and sugars.

This will not stop the diarrhoea, but allows water to be absorbed more easily and help prevent dehydration.

To make these drinks, follow the instructions on the packet. Do not attempt to make your own sugar or salt drinks as the balance needs to be exact.

*Your doctor may request a specimen of your child's stool to be sent to the lab for analysis and identification of the bug.

It can take up to two weeks for the stools to return to normal.

Contact your doctor if your child refuses to take fluids and/or becomes lethargic (drowsy, unenergetic).

As long as your child is not getting worse, there is no cause for concern.

Further guidance

Your doctor will explain any fluids to be given on discharge home.

Fluids to be given on discharge home:

Fluid: _____

Amount per hour: _____

Amount per 24 hours: _____

Further information

NHS 111

☎ 111

or Contact your GP

NHS website - www.nhs.uk

Useful Telephone Numbers

Bluebell Ward, Lister Hospital
Stevenage

☎ 01438 284008

Children's Emergency Department
Lister Hospital

☎ 01438 284333

Urgent Care Centre, New QEII
Welwyn Garden City

☎ 01707 247549

Community Children's Nursing Team

☎ 01438 288370