

Viral Gastroenteritis



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Communicable Disease Division
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Date:

Dear Parent or Guardian:

Several children in school are sick with **viral gastroenteritis**, often referred to as the “stomach flu”. It is an acute viral infection of the gastrointestinal system, with symptoms of nausea, vomiting, and/or diarrhea.

What are the symptoms of viral gastroenteritis?

The symptoms are predominately nausea, vomiting, diarrhea and stomach cramps. Many persons also experience headache, mild fever, and generalized body aches. Two of the most common viruses to cause gastroenteritis are the Norovirus (common in older children and adults) and the Rotavirus (common in young children). Symptoms often come on suddenly and affected people often feel very sick. The symptoms normally last only 24 to 48 hours.

How is viral gastroenteritis spread?

Gastroenteritis viruses are easily spread person-to-person through the stool and vomit of infected people. It may spread through hands, toys, bathroom surfaces, and contaminated food.

How is viral gastroenteritis diagnosed and treated?

The virus may be identified in a stool specimen with laboratory testing. Antibiotics are not effective against gastroenteritis viruses. Comfort measures include getting enough rest and drinking plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration.

How do you control the spread?

Encourage and practice frequent and thorough hand washing with soap and warm water, especially after using the bathroom, changing diapers or helping children use the toilet. Also make sure hands are properly washed before preparing, serving, and eating snacks and meals. Any contaminated areas should be thoroughly cleaned with a 10% bleach water solution or other approved antiviral disinfectant solution. Persons cleaning up vomit should wear gloves and a mask. A good preventive measure is to wipe down shared-surfaces, including desktops and doorknobs with bleach water. Children with gastroenteritis need to be excluded from childcare and school until they no longer have vomiting and diarrhea and can participate in normal activities.

How do I get more information?

For more information about viral gastroenteritis, contact your healthcare provider or Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department at (253) 798-6410 and press “0”.