

Gastroenteritis in Children

Gastroenteritis is an infection of the intestines (gut). This often causes diarrhoea and vomiting, and can be accompanied by stomach cramps. Gastroenteritis in children is mostly caused by viruses, but in rare circumstances can be caused by bacteria.

How long does it last?

Vomiting usually lasts between one to three days, while diarrhoea usually lasts between five and fourteen days. Most children get better without any specific medical treatment and can be safely managed at home.

Does my child need any tests?

As most children get better without treatment, tests are rarely needed. Sometimes your doctor may ask for a stool sample if the symptoms are lasting longer than usual, if there is any history of foreign travel or if there is any blood or mucus in the stool. This test would be to check for rarer bacterial causes.

What should I do?

Many parents become anxious when their child is unwell with gastroenteritis. The key to managing gastroenteritis is to replace the fluid that they have lost. Giving your child plenty of fluids and oral rehydration therapy (e.g. Dioralyte) will prevent dehydration.

Oral rehydration solutions like Dioralyte are a mixture of sugars and salts that are lost in diarrhoea and vomiting, and are ideal when it comes to rehydrating your child. Sachets of Dioralyte can be bought at the pharmacy. You can mix this with water and give this to your child, please follow the instructions on the packet.



Fresh fruit juices and carbonated fluids (fizzy drinks) should be avoided as they do not contain salts that need to be replaced in gastroenteritis.

If your baby is breastfed or bottle-fed continue to do so as normal but try to feed the baby more often or let them spend a longer time on the breast. Extra water or Dioralyte should also be given in between feeds.

Older children may not want to eat during the course of their illness, and that is fine. Just keep the child well hydrated, and they can resume eating when they feel like their appetite is coming back.

When should I bring my child back to the doctors?

It is important to look out for warning signs of dehydration, as this may mean your child may need to stay in hospital for fluid through a tube up through the nose, or a drip through the vein.

Warning signs of dehydration are:

- Vomiting so much that they are not keeping any fluid down.
- Dry tongue and lips and no tears.
- Not passing urine or producing less wet nappies than normal.
- Sunken shadows around the eyes, or sunken soft spot on a baby's head.
- If breathing becomes shallow, erratic or fast.
- If your child is excessively sleepy, floppy or irritable.
- Persistently pale or mottled skin.

Other reasons to bring the child back to the doctors would be:

- Persistent blood or mucus in the diarrhoea.
- Green coloured vomit.
- If the vomiting lasts more than three days, or if the diarrhoea lasts more than 14 days.
- A rash that does not fade on pressing on it (a 'non-blanching rash') or persistent fever.

Anything else i need to do?

- Inform school/nursery of the child's illness. The child should not attend school/nursery while the diarrhoea and vomiting continues, and should only go back 48 hours after their last episode of diarrhoea and vomiting.
- Keep good hygiene around the house, particularly around the toilet and kitchen areas and around other siblings, as gastroenteritis can be spread through touching contaminated body fluids. Teach your child to wash their hands with soap before food, after playtime and going to the toilet, this can help prevent gastroenteritis in the future.
- Wash your hands carefully before and after preparing food, and after nappy changes.
- Prepare and cook food thoroughly. If reheating food, make sure this is hot throughout.
- The child should not swim in swimming pools for two weeks after the last episode of diarrhoea.

Please get in touch with your GP or nurse if you need further advice.

If out of hours, contact NHS 111 advice line who will be able to advise further.

In an emergency please dial 999 or go to Accident & Emergency.

Patient Experience Team

The team are available to help with any concerns/complaints you may have about your experience at the Trust. Their office is in the Main Foyer (Gate 4) of Doncaster Royal Infirmary. Contact can be made either in person, by telephone or email.

The contact details are:

Telephone: 01302 642764 or 0800 028 8059

Email: dbth.pals.dbh@nhs.net