

VIRAL GASTROENTERITIS IN CHILDCARE – FACTSHEET FOR PARENTS AND GUARDIANS

What is viral gastroenteritis (gastro)?

Viral gastroenteritis (gastro) is a common infection of the stomach and intestines that causes vomiting and diarrhoea. Examples of viruses that cause gastro are rotavirus and norovirus. The most common symptoms of viral gastro are non-bloody diarrhoea, vomiting, nausea, headache, fever and chills, and dehydration (from diarrhoea and vomiting).

Viral gastroenteritis can affect people of all ages, although young children and the elderly and people with reduced immune systems are most at risk of severe disease.

How is viral gastro spread?

Viral gastroenteritis can be highly infectious so it can spread very easily.

It spreads when a person comes in contact with the vomit or faeces (poo) of an infected person, including:

- person-to-person contact, for example shaking hands with someone who has been sick and has the virus on their hands
- contaminated objects
- contaminated food or drink
- Infection may also be spread in the air when people vomit.
- Infected people can pass on the illness to others for several days after their symptoms have stopped.

Gastro outbreaks in childcare centres

Gastro outbreaks are common in childcare centres.

When public health advice is followed the outbreak usually occurs for a short time period, however if people return whilst still infectious or precautions are not in place illness can continue to spread.

Childcare centres are provided with guidance to help limit the spread of disease. The centre **must** exclude children with vomiting or loose bowel motions until 48 hours after resolution under the Public Health and Wellbeing Regulations 2019.

What should you do?

If your child has symptoms of gastro or you think they might have gastro, they must be excluded from childcare until 48 hours after the symptoms are gone. If the centre calls you to pick up your child due to gastro symptoms, please pick up your child as soon as possible. These things are critical to stop the outbreak.

If your child becomes ill you can submit a sample of their faeces for testing through your local Council. Your childcare centre can supply you with a testing kit with instructions for drop off points or collection options. Sample results are treated confidentially and can assist you and your GP determine any treatment required. The results also assist us to confirm the source of the outbreak which helps us advise public health actions.

Talk to your child about the importance of handwashing and use resources such as [Soapy Hero](#) to teach them how to wash their hands properly.

Preventing viral gastro at home

To prevent gastro from spreading when there is illness in the home:

- Good old fashion handwashing with soap and water is still the best defence against spreading gastro. Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water after going to the toilet or changing nappies, and before preparing food or eating.
- Clean the kitchen (counters and taps), toys, and nappy change tables frequently.
- Clean the toilet and bathroom regularly (especially the toilet seat, door handles and taps).
- Follow additional advice found at the Better Health Channel links below.

What if other family members become unwell?

It is advisable that people who are unwell do not work or attend childcare centres, kindergartens or schools until 48 hours after symptoms stop.

It is particularly important that food handlers, childcare workers and health care workers do not work for at least 48 hours after symptoms stop.

Treatment for gastro

Treatment depends on the case but may include:

- Plenty of fluids
- Oral hydration drinks, available from your pharmacist
- Admission to hospital for fluid replacement in severe cases
- If symptoms are severe or persist seek medical advice.

Where can you go for more information?

Further information can be found at:

- <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/gastroenteritis-in-children>
- <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/gastroenteritis>
- <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/soapy-hero>
- [Loddon Mallee Public Health Unit](#)