

Rotavirus

Rotavirus is a type of tummy upset (gastroenteritis) that causes diarrhoea, vomiting and fever. In adults it tends to be a mild illness, but in babies and young children it can be more dangerous as they can become very dehydrated.

Children are now immunised against rotavirus for free as part of routine childhood immunisations. They should get the vaccine at six weeks and three months old.



How does rotavirus spread

People who have rotavirus pass the virus out of their body in their poo (faeces) and vomit. If you then eat food, drink water, or touch items contaminated with bacteria from the infected poo or vomit, you can become infected too.

This can occur, for example, if people do not wash their hands properly after changing children's nappies or after going to the toilet. If you have the virus it's easy to contaminate items and surfaces, such as kitchen surfaces, toys, door handles and bathroom surfaces.

The virus can also spread from person to person, for example through touching hands, and you can breathe in the virus if you are in close contact with someone who has it.

Outbreaks, where multiple people get rotavirus at the same time, are more common in places such as early learning services.



Signs and symptoms – what you can see and feel

Symptoms of rotavirus usually include:

- feeling or being sick
- fever
- diarrhoea (runny poo).

Symptoms usually appear around one to three days after someone has been infected.

People are normally unwell for three to eight days. They can pass on the virus to others for up to ten days after first getting symptoms.

Babies and children with rotavirus can get very sick if they become dehydrated from vomiting and diarrhoea. Dehydration can lead to your organs not being able to function properly.

In adults, symptoms may be very mild or they may not have any symptoms at all.

If you are concerned about rotavirus call Healthline on 0800 611 116, or contact your doctor or practice nurse.

Treatment

There is no specific treatment for rotavirus. Over time, people's bodies are able to fight the virus off. To prevent dehydration it's important people with rotavirus, especially young children, drink lots of fluids.

Contact your doctor if you or your child have more severe symptoms. Babies and young children sometimes require hospital treatment if they become very unwell due to dehydration.



Restrictions

If you have rotavirus you are at risk of passing it on to others.

You should stay away from work, school, or day care until 48 hours (two days) after your symptoms have gone away.

Hand hygiene

To help stop the spread of rotavirus it's important to wash your hands properly. You should use soapy water for 20 seconds, then dry well with a clean cloth or paper towel every time you:

- go to the toilet
- prepare food or drinks
- before and after changing a babies nappy
- touch any items contaminated with poo or vomit.

Encourage children with symptoms to wash hands regularly, and supervise young children.

Cleaning and disinfection

- Vomit or faeces should be cleaned up using a detergent solution first, then a solution of household chlorine bleach.
- Wash items contaminated by poo or vomit separately in warm or hot water.
- Dispose of nappies carefully.

Food safety

- People with rotavirus should avoid preparing or handling food for others, until at least two days after symptoms have gone away.
- If rotavirus is in your household cook all food thoroughly. The virus dies in food when food is steaming hot.

Other precautions

- Avoid contact with infants, the elderly, or those with long term illnesses until you are free of all symptoms.
- If rotavirus is in your household keep your children away from day care until everyone has been symptom free for 48 hours.



Prevention/Immunisation

Children are immunised against rotavirus as part of their routine childhood immunisations. The vaccine is free and given at six weeks and three months.

Your baby needs two doses to be fully protected. Your child can catch up on their vaccination doses if they missed them, but the first dose must be given before your baby turns 15 weeks old, and the second dose before they're 25 weeks old.

Vaccination will protect around eight out of 10 babies from severe rotavirus infection.

To get your child vaccinated speak to your doctor or practice nurse.



For more information

- healthnz.govt.nz/conditions-treatments/infectious-diseases/rotavirus

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