

Viral Gastroenteritis: important information

This leaflet provides important advice to someone who may have a viral infection causing diarrhoea and perhaps vomiting.

It is important to remember that a number of things may cause stomach upsets. They include:

- ❖ Food poisoning
- ❖ Infections, diseases & illnesses
- ❖ Anxiety (worry, stress)
- ❖ Some treatments ie antibiotics
- ❖ Alcohol (to excess)

Seek medical advice if you become concerned

What is viral gastroenteritis?

It is an illness that is caused by a number of different viruses, most commonly Norovirus and Rotavirus.

What are the symptoms?

- ❖ Nausea
- ❖ Vomiting – which may be violent
- ❖ Diarrhoea - often watery
- ❖ Stomach pains and cramps
- ❖ Headache
- ❖ Fever
- ❖ Weakness & tiredness

The illness usually occurs within 12 to 48 hours of infection but it can vary depending on the type of virus. These symptoms usually last between 1 & 3 days.

Who can it affect?

ANYONE - but it often causes the biggest problems with the young and the elderly

It can affect both individuals and quite commonly large groups of people

How is it spread?

- ❖ From other people who are ill with Viral gastroenteritis
- ❖ From contact with their stool or vomit
- ❖ From food contaminated by someone who has viral gastroenteritis
- ❖ From raw or undercooked food, particularly meat and shell fish

Can it be prevented?

The following will help to reduce the risk of getting viral gastroenteritis

1. Always washing hands thoroughly with soap and warm water:
 - ❖ after going to the toilet
 - ❖ after contact with pets and animals
 - ❖ after changing a baby's nappy
 - ❖ before preparing and serving food
 - ❖ before eating food
2. Always practising good food hygiene
3. Avoid contaminating cooked food by allowing contact with raw food and dirty knives or chopping boards etc.
4. Thoroughly cooking all food, especially meat and shellfish
5. When travelling abroad to countries where good hygiene may be a concern:
 - ❖ Drink bottled water
 - ❖ Avoid ice in your drinks
 - ❖ Clean your teeth with bottled or treated water
 - ❖ Ensure all food is thoroughly cooked and kept in hygienic conditions

- ❖ Avoid buying food from street vendors
- ❖ Avoid fruit unless you can peel it yourself
- ❖ Wash salad with bottled water

Can I do anything more?

Viral gastro-enteritis is highly infectious, so if you or a member of your household has viral gastro-enteritis or any type of diarrhoea or vomiting, be extra careful with hand and general hygiene practices.

1. Clean the following at least twice daily with detergent and warm water, followed by a suitable disinfectant or bleach:
 - ❖ Toilet Seats
 - ❖ Toilet Bowl
 - ❖ Flush handles
 - ❖ Taps and wash hand basins
2. Follow manufacturer's instructions for disinfectants/ bleach and store safely out of the reach of children.
3. Use a separate towel
4. Soiled clothes should be laundered on as hot a wash as possible. Do not overfill your washing machine or it will not clean them properly. Keep soiled washing separate from the rest of the washing.

Important! Because it is highly infectious, viral gastro-enteritis can be a particular problem in institutions like schools, care homes and hospitals, so extra care with hand and general hygiene is of particular importance here.

Should you stay off work or school?

YES - until you have been free from any symptoms for 48 hours and are feeling quite well.

How do I clean properly?

Cleaning up vomit and/or diarrhoea will need special attention:

- ❖ Wear disposable gloves (or household waterproof gloves). Before removing them from the hand wash gloves with detergent, warm water and dry with paper towel. Wash hands after taking them off
- ❖ Use paper towels to soak up excess liquid then a disposable cloth
- ❖ Flush solid material down the toilet or double wrap in plastic bag sacks for the domestic waste
- ❖ Wash immediate area & hard surfaces (including taps, door knobs, toilet flush handle and seat) with warm water and detergent using disposable cloths or vacuum depending on surface
- ❖ Follow manufacturers' instructions provided on cleaning agents. Ensure solutions are made up freshly
- ❖ Clean at least 2 metres in all directions of a spillage
- ❖ For carpets and soft furnishing consider steam cleaning otherwise clean with detergent, and thoroughly air the area until dry before allowing people back into the area

Contaminated bed linen should be washed separately on a hot wash cycle – ideally a half load.

Need further advice or information?

- ❖ NHS Inform www.nhsinform.co.uk
- ❖ NHS24 ☎ 111 www.nhs24.co.uk
- ❖ www.nhsborders.scot.nhs.uk
- ❖ Local health clinic or GP

This document is available on request in different languages, audio tape, Braille format, large print or BSL DVD. Please contact: NHS Borders on 01896 825522 or email equality@borders.scot.nhs.uk

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