

Gastroenteritis

What is gastroenteritis?

Gastroenteritis is the name for an infection in the stomach and intestine. Gastroenteritis can affect people of all ages, but in babies it can be particularly distressing.

What causes gastroenteritis?

Gastroenteritis is usually caused by viruses and less commonly by bacteria or parasites. It may come from contaminated food or from other people as a result of not washing their hands after toileting or nappy change, or before food handling.

Children can become ill very quickly with gastroenteritis. Children, in particular babies, may dehydrate rapidly due to loss of fluids through diarrhoea and vomiting.

Treatment provided in the emergency department

Oral fluid hydration is the best treatment for mild dehydration. Your child may have been treated in the emergency department using rehydration solution (Hydrolyte) either by mouth or through a tube placed into the nose that goes to the stomach (a nasogastric tube). Various oral rehydration solutions are available from chemists. Always make them up according to the manufacturer's instructions.

Your child may continue to have diarrhoea and vomiting once they are at home, possibly for one to 2 days or longer. The diarrhoea will not stop suddenly, but stools will generally start to firm up and decrease in frequency over 3 to 4 days.

Fluids

While your child is unwell it is important to give regular drinks to prevent dehydration. This may be water or a rehydration solution. Drinks with lots of sugar (including fruit juices) should NOT be given as this may make diarrhoea worse. (Diluting juice with water to a quarter strength is an option).

If your child continues to vomit, give them small drinks often (for example, every 10-15 minutes). As the vomiting settles they can have more to drink but less often. Your child should be drinking at least the amount suggested below while they are awake. If they want to drink more than this they can. If the diarrhoea continues, they will need extra fluid for every large diarrhoea they have.

If your child has received rehydration with a nasogastric tube while at the hospital, he or she may not drink well initially as they may not be thirsty.



Approx weight	Fluid per hour while awake	Approx fluid every 10 mins when vomiting	Extra fluid for every large diarrhoea
8 – 10 kg	40 – 50 ml	10 ml	80 ml
10 – 12.5 kg	50 – 60 ml	10 ml	100 ml
12.5 – 15 kg	60 – 75 ml	15 ml	120 ml
15 – 17.5 kg	75 - 90 ml	15 ml	150 ml
17.5 – 20 kg	90 – 100 ml	20 ml	175 ml
20 – 30 kg	100 ml	20 ml	200 ml
30 – 45 kg	125 ml	20 ml	300 ml

Food

- Do not starve your child.
- There is no need for 'light' diets or special foods.
- Breastfed babies should continue breastfeeding.
- Milk and formula are safe and should not be diluted. If you feel the milk is worsening their diarrhoea, you will need to see your doctor.
- Let your child eat what they normally eat. This could include rice, potatoes, bread, cereal, lean meats, yogurt, fruits and vegetables. However, avoid sugary or sweet foods as they may make the diarrhoea worse.

When to see your doctor

- If your baby is less than 3 months old, as young babies can become ill very quickly.
- If your child is continually vomiting and cannot keep down fluids.
- If you are concerned about the number of watery bowel motions being passed or if the motions have blood in them.

If your child has symptoms of dehydration such as:

- drowsiness
- lethargy
- irritability
- dry mouth
- eyes look sunken
- your child goes for 12 hours without passing urine.

What to do

- As long as your child has diarrhoea and vomiting, keep them away from other children as much as possible, and home from school or childcare centres.
- Wash your hands after you have been changing or playing with your child.
- Teach your child to always wash their hands after going to the toilet.

If you are concerned

Go to your local doctor or closest emergency department.



Government of **Western Australia**
Child and Adolescent Health Service

This document can be made available in alternative formats on request for a person with a disability.

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Produced by: Emergency Department
Ref: 303 © CAHS 2016 Revised 2022

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