

# Gastroenteritis

Gastroenteritis is the inflammation of the stomach and intestines. It may be caused by bacteria (such as *Campylobacter*, *Salmonella* and *Shigella*), viruses (such as rotavirus or norovirus) or parasites (such as *giardia* and *cryptosporidium*).

## Signs and Symptoms:

The main symptoms are diarrhoea and vomiting.

The time from contact with the bacteria or the virus and the development of symptoms is usually about 1 – 3 days. Parasitic infections take about 5 – 15 days for symptoms to appear.

## Treatment:

Most gastroenteritis infections resolve without treatment. It is very important to drink plenty of fluids to avoid dehydration. If you are very unwell, see your doctor, who will advise if you need any treatment.

## Control

Adults should not return to work until diarrhoea has ceased for 24 hours and up to 48 hours for some conditions. Children should not return to child care or school until diarrhoea has ceased for 24 hours or up to 48 hours for some conditions. People who work in the food industry or health care professionals should not return to work until diarrhoea has ceased for 48 hours.

## Transmission:

Gastroenteritis is highly infectious and can be passed from person to person very easily. The organisms that cause illness may also be found in contaminated water or food. Gastroenteritis usually spreads when hands, food, objects and surfaces become contaminated with faeces or vomit and the infectious organism is transferred to the mouth when eating, drinking or touching the mouth. The spread of some viruses can also occur via small airborne particles circulating in the air during or after vomiting attacks.

People with gastroenteritis are very infectious while they are feeling unwell and they can continue to be infectious for days or weeks after they have recovered.

## Prevention:

Hand washing and good hygiene practices are essential. Wash hands with soap and water, rubbing hands together for at least 20 seconds and dry thoroughly on a disposable or clean towel before handling food and after going to the toilet. Because the vomit or diarrhoea can be very infectious, it is most important that any spills are cleaned up quickly and appropriately in the following manner.

### First protect yourself

- Wear gloves if possible.
- Cover any cuts and abrasions on your hands. Your skin is a protective barrier against you becoming infected from infectious organisms.
- After cleaning up wash hands with soap and water and dry thoroughly on a disposable or clean towel.

### Cleaning up spills

- Where possible, mop up the spills using disposable paper towels which can then be thrown away. Seal these items in a plastic bag before placing in the rubbish bin.
- Cleaning with water and detergent is sufficient to clean up after most gastroenteritis spills.
- It is important to clean all surfaces and objects soiled or possibly soiled during the illness with soapy water, rinsing well before drying. This may include toilets, benches, showers, floors, toys, wash basins, taps and door handles. Poor cleaning up will spread the virus and increase the risk of infection.
- Clean and dry the mop thoroughly after use.
- Washable linen and clothing can be cleaned by machine washing, with usual laundry detergent, on the hot cycle. Avoid over-loading the machine as this may interfere with rinsing. Remove solid material before putting linen in the washing machine.
- Items that are not suitable for washing, e.g. blankets, mattresses and pillows should be dry cleaned where possible. If items cannot be dry-cleaned, wash thoroughly and dry them in the sunlight.
- Cleaning up is very important. Poor cleaning up will just spread the virus and increase the risk of infection.

## Help and assistance:

For further information please contact your local doctor, community health centre, nearest population health unit or contact Queensland Health information phone number 13HEALTH.

URL: <http://conditions.health.qld.gov.au/HealthCondition/condition/14/33/60/gastroenteritis>

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**Related Content**

[Diarrhoea in young children fact sheet](http://conditions.health.qld.gov.au/HealthCondition/condition/14/33/39/Diarrhoea-in-Young-Children) (<http://conditions.health.qld.gov.au/HealthCondition/condition/14/33/39/Diarrhoea-in-Young-Children>)

[Norovirus fact sheet](http://conditions.health.qld.gov.au/HealthCondition/condition/14/217/484/Norovirus) (<http://conditions.health.qld.gov.au/HealthCondition/condition/14/217/484/Norovirus>)

[Rotavirus fact sheet](http://conditions.health.qld.gov.au/HealthCondition/condition/14/217/121/Rotavirus) (<http://conditions.health.qld.gov.au/HealthCondition/condition/14/217/121/Rotavirus>)

[Clean Up for Gastroenteritis Outbreak Prevention](#)

([https://www.health.qld.gov.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0026/702485/gastro-outbreak-cleanup.pdf?bustCache=27959454](https://www.health.qld.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0026/702485/gastro-outbreak-cleanup.pdf?bustCache=27959454))

**References**

Heymann, DL, ed. (2015). *Control of Communicable Diseases Manual*, 20th edition. Washington, DC: American Public Health Association.

If you are in an emergency situation, call 000

**Contact**

Get qualified health advice 24/7 for the cost of a local call. 13 HEALTH (13 43 25 84)

**healthdirect:**

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