

Gastroenteritis and Dehydration in Children

Today your child was treated for gastroenteritis (“stomach flu”). The stomach flu is caused by a virus or food toxin. Symptoms include vomiting (throwing up) and diarrhea (loose, watery stools).

These symptoms may cause dehydration (loss of water and minerals from the body). To prevent this, you must urge your child to drink small amounts of fluid on a regular basis.

We do not think your child needs to stay in the hospital. We believe that it is safe for your child to go home. Here are answers to some common questions about this illness.

Suggested clear liquids for children

Under the age of 1 year:

- Pedialyte
- Other brands of oral rehydration fluids (Walgreens, Target, CVS; sold as liquid, powder or freezer pops)

Over the age of 1 year:

- Pedialyte
- Half-strength Gatorade (mixture of ½ Gatorade with ½ water).
- You may try other clear liquids. The best ones contain sugar, sodium and potassium.

How do you treat stomach flu?

Sometimes we will test for a virus or to see if your child is dehydrated. We do not prescribe antibiotics because they do not work on the flu virus. These medicines only work on infections caused by germs (bacteria). Children usually get better in 2 to 5 days.

How do you prevent dehydration?

The best way to prevent loss of water from the body is to drink enough of the right kind of fluids. If your child is very dehydrated or cannot drink enough, we may need to give fluids through an IV (small tube that is placed in a vein).

What should I give my child to eat and drink?

If your child has vomiting (with or without diarrhea)

1. At first, give your child small sips of clear liquids, about 1 teaspoon about every 5 minutes.
2. After 2 hours of clear liquids, give your child small amounts of breast milk, milk or formula. Do not add extra water to breast milk or formula.
3. If your child eats solid foods, begin to add small amounts of bland foods. These may include cereal, bread, noodles, mashed potatoes, cooked vegetables, rice, crackers, yogurt or applesauce.

4. After 24 hours, return to your child's normal diet and feeding schedule.

Do not give drinks with caffeine (some teas, soda, PowerAde and coffee) or foods with lots of sugar or fat. They will make vomiting and diarrhea worse.

If your child has diarrhea only (no vomiting)

1. Give your child extra liquids. Start with breast milk, milk or formula. Do not add extra water to breast milk or formula.
2. If your child eats solid foods, begin to add small amounts of bland foods (see number 3 on the first page).
3. If the diarrhea is severe, give plenty of extra fluids.
4. After 24 hours, return to your child's normal diet and feeding schedule.
5. You may try feeding your child plain yogurt (with active cultures) or products from the drug store such as Culturelle or Florastor Kids.

Are there any medicines that may help?

- For discomfort, give acetaminophen (Children's Tylenol). **Children over 6 months** may have ibuprofen (Children's Motrin) or Tylenol.
- For diarrhea, do not use drug-store medicines (Imodium or Pepto-Bismol).

Can others get the virus?

Yes. To stop the spread of the virus, wash your hands before you eat and after changing a diaper. Never change a diaper near an area where you prepare food. Also, make sure your child gets the shot for rotavirus, a common cause of stomach flu.

Return to the emergency department right away if you notice:

- Dry mouth
- No tears when crying or eyes are sunken
- Limp body or weakness
- The soft spot on your baby's head looks sunken
- Little or no urine (pee)
- Blood in the vomit or diarrhea (looks red or black)
- Seizures or "fits"
- Child is very sleepy or confused
- Pain in belly that gets worse
- New fever over 102°F (38.8°C) when taken by mouth.

In an emergency, call 911.

For more information:

Call the nurse advisors' line: 612-672-1065 or Visit www.pemguidelines.org