

# **Gastroenteritis Advice for Parents**

## **Children's Services**

Lincoln County Hospital

Pilgrim Hospital, Boston

Grantham and District Hospital

[www.ulh.nhs.uk](http://www.ulh.nhs.uk)

## Aim of the leaflet

This leaflet aims to provide parents with information and advice on gastroenteritis.

## Introduction

Gastroenteritis is a very common infectious illness involving vomiting and diarrhoea. In the UK, it is usually the result of a viral infection, with Rotavirus being the leading cause but can also be caused by bacteria and parasites.

Most attacks clear up without medical treatment, but if your child has severe diarrhoea and vomiting, he/she may become dehydrated. This can be particularly serious in babies and young children, so medical treatment should be sought immediately if dehydration is suspected.

You should keep your child off school or nursery for 48 hours after the last episode of diarrhoea or vomiting. As gastroenteritis is very infectious, you must also follow strict hygiene measures, including disinfecting toilets after use and regular hand washing, particularly after using the toilet.

## Symptoms

In addition to diarrhoea and vomiting, other common symptoms include headache, loss of appetite, lack of energy and feeling tired and sleepy. Your child may refuse to eat.

Young children under 2 years of age are at risk of dehydration.

Signs of severe dehydration include sunken eyes, dry mouth, passing very little or no urine, confusion or irritability or floppiness in babies.

A sign of dehydration in babies is a sunken fontanelle, the soft area of the scalp. You may be able to feel this gently with a fingertip.

## Treatment

Drinking lots of fluids will help replace the fluids lost through diarrhoea and vomiting and prevent dehydration. Even if your child feels sick encourage small, frequent sips of fluids. Rehydration mixes can be bought from pharmacists but should only be given on medical advice.

Fluids can be water, sweetened weak squashes but not milk. Sucking an ice lolly can also be encouraged.

Babies should be given their normal feed.

**NEVER** give anti-diarrhoea medicines to babies or children, as some may have dangerous side effects.

Starving your child does not cure gastroenteritis any quicker than introducing a light diet as soon as possible. Begin with light, bland foods such as bread, pasta or rice.

Antibiotics are not usually helpful in gastroenteritis because most cases in the UK are caused by viruses.

## Prevention

Routine hygiene measures in the home can help to prevent infections that can cause gastroenteritis. Wash your hands after using the toilet, gardening and playing with pets. Wash them before eating and preparing food. When cooking and storing food, keep raw meat separate from cooked and ready to eat foods and make sure raw meat cannot drip onto other foods in your fridge.

All babies aged 2 and 3 months old are able to be vaccinated against Rotavirus.

Prevent the virus spreading amongst other household members by regularly cleaning toilets and using disinfectant to wipe the handle and seat after each use by the infected person. Do not share towels and flannels.

If symptoms do not start improving after 2 to 3 days, if there is blood in your child's urine or faeces and if there are serious signs of dehydration or if you are concerned, it is important that your child is seen by a doctor.

Telephone:

Safari Day Unit, Lincoln	01522 573172
Rainforest Ward, Lincoln	01522 573786
Children's Ward, Boston	01205 445563

OR contact your hospital Accident and Emergency department or your GP.

## References

If you require a full list of references for this leaflet please email [patient.information@ulh.nhs.uk](mailto:patient.information@ulh.nhs.uk)

The Trust endeavours to ensure that the information given here is accurate and impartial.



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