

Viral Gastroenteritis (Diarrhoea and Vomiting)

Other formats

If you need this information in another format such as audio CD, Braille, large print, high contrast, British Sign Language or translated into another language, please contact the PALS desk on 01392 402093 or at rduh.pals-eastern@nhs.net (for Mid Devon, East Devon and Exeter services) or on 01271 314090 or at rduh.pals-northern@nhs.net (for North Devon services).

What is viral gastroenteritis?

Viral gastroenteritis is an infection that causes inflammation of the stomach and intestines. A range of viruses can cause it (Norovirus being the most common).

Symptoms can include diarrhoea, vomiting, abdominal pain, headaches or a combination of any or all of these. Symptoms usually persist for 1-4 days, depending on the virus involved.

Is viral gastroenteritis a serious illness?

No, viral gastroenteritis is not usually a serious illness. However, dehydration from loss of fluids may occur in more vulnerable people, such as the elderly or very young. If symptoms are severe, hospital treatment may be required to correct the dehydration.

How is the infection treated?

The symptoms generally resolve in time without treatment. When symptoms first develop, you may not want to eat, however, it is very important that you continue to drink plenty of fluids to avoid dehydration. Food can gradually be re-introduced when you feel able to tolerate it. If symptoms persist, medical advice should be sought.

Can the infection spread from person to person?

Viral gastroenteritis can spread very easily from person to person. Outbreaks of infection can occur in settings such as hotels, hospitals, schools and nursing homes where people share toilets and are in close contact with one another. Affected people are considered to be infectious until they have been free of any symptoms for 48 hours.

Can the spread of viral gastroenteritis be reduced?

The chances of spreading the virus can be reduced by:

- Making sure that everyone washes their hands properly after using the toilet and after having contact with anyone with symptoms.
- Keeping toilets and bathrooms clean. Separate toilets will be designated for use by affected hospital patients.
- Isolating affected patients if an outbreak of infection occurs in hospital. It is very important that those patients who might have been affected do not have close contact with unaffected patients. For this reason, patients may be cared for in a single room or a designated bay on the ward until they have been free of symptoms for 48 hours.
- Keeping patients who have been exposed to infection away from those who have not for up to 72 hours. This will not stop patients from being discharged to their own homes but may delay transfer to other healthcare settings.
- Making sure that any visitors to an affected ward clean their hands, before and after going to see patients.
- Making sure that relatives and friends do not visit if they have symptoms of diarrhoea or vomiting themselves.
- Discouraging children and the very elderly from visiting wards during an outbreak.
- When a ward is affected by an outbreak of diarrhoea and vomiting, visiting to the affected ward(s) may be restricted. In exceptional circumstances, arrangements must be discussed with the clinical nurse manager or ward manager.
- Visitors should avoid eating or drinking on the ward and must wash their hands with soap and water prior to leaving.
- Visitors must be prepared for the fact that there is a possibility that they will also become infected. If visitors do develop symptoms of diarrhoea or vomiting, they must cease visiting and stay away from the hospital until they have been free of these symptoms for at least 48 hours.

Further information

If you have any questions that we have not answered in this leaflet, please ask your nurse or doctor caring for you on the ward or contact one of the Infection Control nurses.

For Eastern services, call 01392 402355

For Northern services, call 01271 322680

PALS

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) ensures that the NHS listens to patients, relatives, carers and friends, answers questions and resolves concerns as quickly as possible. If you have a query or concern, please contact:

PALS Mid Devon, East Devon and Exeter

- call 01392 402093 or email rduh.pals-eastern@nhs.net. You can also visit the PALS and Information Centre in person at the Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital in Wonford, Exeter.

PALS North Devon

- call 01271 314090 or email rduh.pals-northern@nhs.net. You can also visit the PALS and Information Centre in person at the North Devon District Hospital in Barnstaple.

Have your say

Royal Devon University Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust aims to provide high quality services. However, please tell us when something could be improved. If you have a comment or compliment about a service or treatment, please raise your comments with a member of staff or the PALS team in the first instance.

Tell us about your experience of our services. Share your feedback on the Care Opinion website www.careopinion.org.uk.

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