

Caring for a Child with Gastroenteritis at home – advice for Parents and Carers

Introduction

Gastroenteritis is an infection of the stomach and intestines which causes diarrhoea and vomiting. It can be caused by viral infections such as rotavirus (commonly in children under five years) or norovirus (more commonly in older children and adults), or by bacterial infection.

Diarrhoea and vomiting caused by gastroenteritis are common in children, particularly those younger than five years. Severe diarrhoea and vomiting can lead to dehydration, which is serious, but most children with gastroenteritis can usually be managed at home with advice from healthcare professionals. Diarrhoea usually lasts for five to seven days and stops within two weeks. Vomiting usually lasts for one to two days and stops within three days.

The following advice is to help you to look after your child at home.

Preventing the spread of gastroenteritis

Wash hands with soap (liquid if possible) in warm running water and dry thoroughly. This is the most important way to prevent the spread of gastroenteritis.

Hands should be washed after going to the toilet or changing nappies and before touching food.

Towels used by children with gastroenteritis should not be shared with other members of the family.

Children should not attend any school or other childcare facility while they have diarrhoea or vomiting caused by gastroenteritis.

Children should not go back to school or other childcare facility until at least 48 hours after the last episode of diarrhoea or vomiting.

Children should not swim in swimming pools for two weeks after the last episode of diarrhoea.

Managing your child's drinking

The doctor will have assessed your child and decided if s/he is dehydrated. If they are dehydrated they will require rehydration therapy. The type of rehydration therapy will depend on how severe the dehydration is. When the doctor decides that your child is well enough to go home you will need to continue the rehydration therapy at home.

Breast fed babies should continue to be breast fed during the rehydration phase, as long as they are tolerating the breast milk. If they are not tolerating breast milk, follow the advice below.

Encourage your child to drink. The best type of fluid is oral rehydration solution such as Dioralyte, which is available without a prescription from all chemists. Give small amounts frequently eg. 5-10 mls every five minutes, initially, then increase it when there is no more vomiting until your child is tolerating full cups or bottles of the fluid.

Do not give fruit juices or fizzy drinks during the rehydration phase or until diarrhoea has stopped. Do not give solid foods during the rehydration phase.

Once they are tolerating this amount of fluid they can restart their normal full strength formula feed and then solid diet.

How to recognise dehydration - signs to look out for

If your child continues to vomit or does not improve, and has the following signs and symptoms, you must seek help or advice, for signs with a star you must seek **immediate** help:

- Appears to be getting worse, does not tolerate fluids or will not take them
- They do not pass urine at least twice in 24 hours
- They pass more than eight loose stools per day or if there is any blood in the stool
- Their mouth and lips appear to be dry
- They have sunken eyes
- They have cold hands and feet (extremities)
- They appear to be lethargic, floppy, irritable or are not responding to you normally *
- Their skin appears more baggy than usual (loss of skin turgor) *
- They are breathing much more quickly than normal *
- Their pulse rate is much faster than normal *

Contact details

Conquest Hospital		Eastbourne DGH	
Kipling Ward	01424 758039	Friston Ward	01323 414946
Kipling SSPAU	01424 757507	Friston SSPAU	01323 435766

NHS Direct - Call 24 hours on: 111. A 24 hours a day, nurse led, confidential helpline providing advice and information relating to health care.

Frequently asked questions

Q: Is my child infectious? Can my other children, family or friends catch it? Do I need to take any special precautions?

A: Yes, yes and yes! Diarrhoea is usually infectious. The best way to stop spread of infection is by strict hand washing as in the advice above. Continue to wash and sterilise your baby's bottles and utensils as usual. You do not need to sterilise other plates and cups but they must be washed thoroughly in soap and water before reuse. Please take extra care if you have other young children as they often tend to share each others cups, dummies etc.

Q: My child's bottom has become sore, is this normal?

A: Yes. The diarrhoea may make your child's bottom sore. It is advisable to wash the area with water, dry gently and apply a good barrier cream to treat it and protect it from the diarrhoea. Your local pharmacist can advise you if you are unsure what product is most suitable.

Q: Does my child need antibiotics?

A: Diarrhoea and vomiting is usually caused by a virus and does not require antibiotics. There are a few exceptions to this and the doctor will have informed you if your child has one of these less common causes.

Q: Can I give my child any medicine to stop the diarrhoea and vomiting?

A: No. babies and children should not be given any anti-diarrhoea or anti-sickness medicines.

Important information

The information in this leaflet is for guidance purposes only and is not provided to replace professional clinical advice from a qualified practitioner.

Your comments

We are always interested to hear your views about our leaflets. If you have any comments, please contact the Patient Experience Team – Tel: (01323) 417400 Ext: 5860 or by email at: esh-tr.patientexperience@nhs.net

Hand hygiene

The Trust is committed to maintaining a clean, safe environment. Hand hygiene is very important in controlling infection. Alcohol gel is widely available at the patient bedside for staff use and at the entrance of each clinical area for visitors to clean their hands before and after entering.

Other formats

If you require any of the Trust leaflets in alternative formats, such as large print or alternative languages, please contact the Equality and Human Rights Department.

Tel: 01424 755255 Ext: 2620

After reading this information are there any questions you would like to ask? Please list below and ask your nurse or doctor.

Reference

CKS Guidelines (2007), Gastroenteritis, NICE clinical guideline 84 (2009), Diarrhoea and vomiting in children

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