

About Viral Gastroenteritis

Viral gastroenteritis (gastro) is a viral infection of the stomach and intestines. It is often caused by viruses such as norovirus, rotavirus, sapovirus and adenovirus. The main symptoms of gastro are vomiting, diarrhoea, abdominal cramps and fever. These symptoms usually start between 24 – 48 hours after exposure but can occur as early as 12 hours after contact with a symptomatic person.

How is Viral Gastroenteritis spread?

Gastro is highly contagious and is found in the vomit or faeces of the infected person, just 1 gram of infected faeces contains 15 billion infectious doses. These can become aerosolised when the infected person vomits or uses the toilet and can settle on nearby people, linen, food or surfaces, therefore it is very easily passed on. The infected person may continue to spread the illness for up to 48 hours after symptoms have stopped.

How to prevent it from spreading

Hand hygiene is the single most effective way of preventing the spread of viral gastroenteritis. It is very important to perform hand hygiene before eating, drinking, food preparation, after using the toilet or after touching a surface or item likely to be contaminated. This is achieved by washing your hands with soap and running water for at least 20 seconds or by using an alcohol based hand rub.

You are considered to be infectious for up to 48 hours after you have last had any symptoms of gastro. The infectious person must exclude themselves from school, work and food preparation and limit their contact with other people during this time.

Viral Gastroenteritis



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Can I have visitors?

You may still have visitors however, it is very important for your visitors to use good hand hygiene practices and use personal protective equipment; gowns, gloves and masks to protect themselves and others from contracting or spreading the virus. Please ask staff for assistance with this.

It is recommended that children, elderly and the immunocompromised do not visit until you are no longer considered infectious, as they are more susceptible to these viruses and potential complications. In addition, visitors please:

- Don't sit or lie on the patient's bed
- Don't use the patient's bathroom
- Don't visit if you have any illness
- Don't visit any other patients in other parts of the hospital

Symptoms of a Viral Gastroenteritis infection

The most common symptoms of a Viral Gastroenteritis infection are:

- watery diarrhoea, which can be bloody
- painful tummy cramps
- loss of appetite and weight loss
- nausea
- abdominal pain or tenderness
- fever

Diarrhoea can be caused by a number of conditions and is a common side effect of antibiotics, so having diarrhoea while taking antibiotics doesn't necessarily mean you have a Viral Gastroenteritis infection.

Can i still have visitors?

Yes – you can still have visitors however you should limit your contact with others until you have had 48 hours

without diarrhea. Encourage your visitors to perform hand hygiene before and after they enter your room using soap and water.

What happens when i go home?

When you return home it is important for you, your family and your friends to continue the good hand hygiene practices that you have been taught in hospital. Drink plenty of fluids to avoid dehydration and eat plain foods such as soup, rice, pasta and bread if you feel hungry. Don't take anti-diarrhoeal medication, as this can stop the infection being cleared from your body

Where can i get further information?

You can talk to your doctor or the nursing staff. If you wish to speak with the Infection Control Department ask your nurse to contact us.

How to stop Viral Gastroenteritis spreading

Viral Gastroenteritis infections can be passed on very easily. You can reduce your risk of picking it up or spreading it by practising good hygiene, both at home and in healthcare settings.

The following measures can help:

- stay at home until at least 48 hours after your symptoms have cleared up
- wash your hands regularly with soap and water, particularly after going to the toilet and before eating – use liquid rather than bar soap and don't use flannels or nail brushes
- clean contaminated surfaces – such as the toilet, flush handle, light switches and door handles – with a bleach-based cleaner after each use
- don't share towels and flannels
- wash contaminated clothes and sheets separately

from other washing at the highest possible temperature

- when visiting someone in hospital, observe any visiting guidelines, avoid taking any children under the age of 12, and wash your hands with liquid soap and water when entering and leaving ward areas – don't rely on alcohol hand gels, as they're not effective against Viral Gastroenteritis

How will my care change whilst in hospital?

You will be managed using infection control contact precautions until you are discharged. A sign is placed outside your door to alert hospital staff for the need to use protective infection control contact precautions. This sign also alerts visitors of the need to speak with nursing staff prior to entering your room.

The hospital staff will wear protective clothing such as gloves and an apron or gown when they enter your room. These items are disposed of in a separate waste bin as the staff member leaves your room.

Good hand hygiene practices

Hand Hygiene is the most effective way to prevent ALL infections, including the flu and the common cold. Encourage your family and friends to maintain good hand hygiene practices every day. Hand Washing Alternative - Alcohol based hand rub / gel.

During your stay in hospital you may have seen the staff using an alcohol-based hand rub, as an alternative to soap and water. Alcohol-based hand rubs or gels can be used for hand hygiene as long as your hands are not visibly soiled / dirty.

References

Children's Health Queensland Hospital and Health Service – Fact Sheet Gastroenteritis, March 2015.

NSW Government, Communicable diseases fact sheet – Viral Gastroenteritis, July 2018.