

# Viral Gastroenteritis

---

## What is it?

- Gastroenteritis means inflammation or swelling of the stomach and small and large intestines (guts).
- Viral gastroenteritis is an infection caused by a variety of viruses that result in vomiting and/or diarrhea.
- It is often called the “stomach flu” although it is not caused by the influenza virus.

## What causes viral gastroenteritis?

- Many different viruses can cause gastroenteritis, including Rotavirus and Norovirus.
- Your doctor can determine if the diarrhea is caused by a virus or by something else, such as bacteria, parasites, medications or medical conditions.

## What are the symptoms of viral gastroenteritis?

- Symptoms of viral gastroenteritis include watery diarrhea, nausea and/or vomiting and abdominal cramps.
- Headache, muscle aches and low-grade fever may be present.
- Symptoms usually begin 1 to 3 days after infection and may last as long as 10 days, depending on which virus is responsible.

## How does viral gastroenteritis spread?

- Viral gastroenteritis is easily spread. Close contact with infected individuals, especially those that do not wash their hands regularly after using the bathroom, is a common way of spreading the virus.
- Foods or beverages contaminated with the virus by infected persons can be another source of infection.
- The virus can survive on surfaces and objects for days.

## Is there treatment for viral gastroenteritis?

- There is no treatment that targets the virus itself.
- The number one way of treating viral gastroenteritis in children and adults is fluid replacement to prevent dehydration (fluid loss).
- Your physician may give you specific instructions about what kinds of fluid to take and other general advice.

## How can viral gastroenteritis be prevented?

- Clean your hands. Cleaning your hands well and often is the best way to prevent the spread. Clean hands before and after using the toilet, before preparing or eating meals and after changing diapers.
- Clean surfaces that are touched often and clean with a household disinfectant.
- Clean bathrooms after episodes of diarrhea and vomiting.
- Wash fruits and vegetables well before eating.
- At home, use separate personal items such as towels, eating utensils, glasses and plates.
- If food or water is thought to be contaminated, it should be avoided.

**Adherence to Infection Prevention and Control measures by staff and visitors is required to prevent the spread of infection.**

**Stop the spread of germs and infection.  
Clean your hands.**



This fact sheet provides basic general information only and is to be used as a quick guide, not as a complete resource on the subject. If you have any further questions, ask Infection Prevention & Control or your health care provider.