

# Rotavirus

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Rotavirus is a common cause of gastroenteritis (or 'gastro') in children. Symptoms include vomiting, fever and watery diarrhoea. It usually starts suddenly. Rotavirus mainly affects infants and young children up to 3 years of age. In cooler parts of Australia, rotavirus peaks in mid to late winter. In the northern tropical and arid parts of Australia, disease peaks are less predictable.

Rotavirus gastroenteritis can cause dehydration because of the fluid lost through vomiting and diarrhoea.

## How it spreads

The virus is present in large amounts in the faeces (poo) of an infected person.

The disease spreads when rotavirus enters the body. This can happen when:

- people inhale droplets produced when an infected person vomits
- people touch contaminated surfaces (including clothes) and then touch their mouth, nose or eyes
- people eat contaminated food.

Surfaces and food can become contaminated when:

- infected droplets are spread onto surfaces when an infected person vomits
- infected people do not wash their hands well after using the toilet and their hands contaminate food or surfaces
- people do not wash their hands well after changing the nappy of an infected baby and their hands contaminate food or surfaces.

Vaccination against rotavirus is part of the routine childhood vaccination schedule in the Australian National Immunisation Program. Rotavirus vaccine does not completely prevent infection, but it prevents severe disease that might otherwise require hospitalisation.

## Exclusion period

Exclude until there has not been any diarrhoea or vomiting for at least 24 hours.

Staff with these symptoms should not handle food until they have not vomited or had diarrhoea for at least 48 hours (they can be assigned to other duties after at least 24 hours, or stay away from the service).

Some states and territories may have different requirements for gastroenteritis (diarrhoea or vomiting). Check if your state or territory has different requirements for gastroenteritis.

## Actions for educators and other staff

Follow the exclusion period in the *Staying healthy* guidelines.

If you have 2 or more cases of gastroenteritis in your service, contact your local public health unit for advice. This is legally required in most states and territories (except South Australia).

Ensure staff and children have good hand hygiene.

Ensure staff use appropriate cleaning practices, as described in the *Staying healthy* guidelines. Use disinfectants that are effective against rotavirus.

The virus is relatively resistant to disinfectants, so thoroughly clean and disinfect any surfaces contaminated by vomit or diarrhoea, as well as bathrooms and high-touch surfaces. This reduces the risk of large outbreaks.

Review vaccination records of all staff and children.

## Actions for parents and carers

Make sure your child is immunised against rotavirus by keeping their childhood vaccinations up to date.

Keep your child at home until there has been no diarrhoea for at least 24 hours and they feel well.

Give your child plenty of fluids and talk to your pharmacist about rehydration solution options.

See a doctor immediately if your child cannot keep down any fluids. Babies under 6 months should always be seen by a doctor if they have gastro.

Encourage your child to wash their hands regularly.

## More information about rotavirus

See healthdirect for more information on prevention, diagnosis and treatment of rotavirus ([healthdirect.gov.au/rotavirus](http://healthdirect.gov.au/rotavirus)).

To find out if a child needs medical help:

- use the online symptom checker ([healthdirect.gov.au/symptom-checker](http://healthdirect.gov.au/symptom-checker))
- speak to a registered nurse by calling the 24-hour health advice hotline on 1800 022 222.