



Gastroenteritis

Gastroenteritis is an illness of the stomach and intestines. Symptoms may include vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal cramps, headache, and fever. Gastroenteritis can be caused by bacteria, viruses, toxins, and parasites. The length of illness usually depends on the cause. Most people get well in two or three days without medical follow up. Some people, however, become dehydrated from losing too many fluids during vomiting and diarrhea. They may have trouble eating. Drinking lots of water and eating foods like bananas, rice, applesauce, and crackers can help prevent dehydration. Alcohol or soft drinks may make the dehydration worse.

Here are ways people can decrease their risk of getting or passing on infectious gastroenteritis to others:

- ✓ Consider both the diarrhea and the vomit as contagious.
- ✓ Wash hands frequently, especially after using the bathroom, after changing diapers and before preparing food. Hands should be washed with soap under running water for at least 20 seconds.
- ✓ When a person is ill, replace the cloth towel in the bathroom with disposable paper towels and use disposable drinking cups.
- ✓ If you are helping a person who is actively vomiting or having diarrhea, try to wear a mask and gloves to avoid being exposed. Remove as soon as you are done and wash hands well. Dispose in a plastic bag lined waste can.
- ✓ Any person with diarrhea should not prepare food (either at home or as part of a job). Sick people should stay away from well people as much as possible.
- ✓ Infants and children with diarrhea should not go to day care centers while having the symptoms.
- ✓ Viruses and bacteria can stay on surfaces. Any vomit or diarrhea on surfaces should be cleaned up with a 1:10 bleach solution (1/2 cup bleach in 5 cups water).
- ✓ Wash any clothing soiled with diarrhea or vomit as quickly as possible. Do not shake out the clothing and place them under the water level in the washer.
- ✓ The stool can be infectious for several days to a couple weeks after symptoms end. Hand washing is still very important.

Seek medical evaluation with any of the following symptoms:

- ✓ Inability to eat or drink
- ✓ Dizziness
- ✓ Fever
- ✓ Diarrhea lasting greater than 2 days
- ✓ Bloody diarrhea

For more information about infectious gastrointestinal illnesses, please contact a health care provider or Summit County Public Health at 330-375-2662.