

Fact Sheet: Rotavirus

What is Rotavirus?

Rotavirus is a virus that causes severe diarrhea. Rotavirus is the most common cause of severe diarrhea in infants and young children in the United States. Worldwide, rotavirus is a major cause of childhood deaths.

What are the symptoms?

- Fever
- Upset stomach and vomiting
- Diarrhea
- The diarrhea can be mild to severe and generally will last three to nine days. Severe diarrhea and dehydration occur primarily among children three months to 35 months of age.
- Most cases of rotavirus diarrhea occur between November and May.
- Symptoms usually occur 24-72 hours after exposure.

How is it spread?

Rotavirus is usually spread from hand to mouth and is highly contagious. Children can spread rotavirus both before and after they exhibit symptoms. Contaminated hands or objects may transmit the virus from an infected child or caregiver to another person. Common diaper changing areas can be a source of contamination and spread the virus.

When should you call a doctor if your child has diarrhea?

- Contact your health care provider if diarrhea is accompanied by the following (particularly if your child is less than 6 months of age):
- High fever (temperature over 100.5 °F, measured orally, 101.5 °F axillary, or 99.5 °F rectally)
 - Blood in bowel movement
 - Prolonged vomiting that prevents keeping liquids down (which can lead to dehydration)
 - Signs of dehydration, including
 - ✓ Decrease in urination
 - ✓ Sunken eyes
 - ✓ No tears when child cries
 - ✓ Extreme thirst
 - ✓ Unusual drowsiness or fussiness
 - ✓ Dry, sticky mouth, cracked lips

How is it treated?

- Dehydration is the biggest concern with diarrheal illnesses in young children.
- Prevention of dehydration in children may require special fluids.
- The best fluid to give children with diarrhea is an oral re-hydration solution such as: Cerahyte, Pedialyte, or Oralyte. These solutions may be purchased at most drug stores and grocery stores.
- Sports drinks **do not** replace the fluid losses correctly and should **not** be used for the treatment of diarrheal illnesses.
- Children who are breastfeeding, taking formula, or taking solids should continue to follow their usual diet.
- Antibiotics are not effective in treating rotavirus.

Prevention:

- A new oral vaccine for the prevention of Rotavirus was approved this year for use in children 6-32 weeks of age.
- Adults should wash their hands after using the toilet, helping a child use the toilet, or diapering a child and before preparing, serving, or eating food.
- Children should wash their hands after using the toilet, after having their diapers changed (an adult should wash the hands of an infant or small child), and before eating.
- Daycares should place a disposable cover on changing tables that is removed after each child is changed. The table should then be cleaned with a 1:10 bleach solution. Use diapers with a waterproof outer.
- Children should wear clothes over diapers.

This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider. For more information call your health care provider or call Washtenaw County Public Health at 734-544-6700.

