



*Welcome to BMC Health and Wellness Newsletter. This newsletter will be produced bi-monthly for this semester. A range of topics will be highlighted. We request your suggestions on topics you would like to see discussed*

## Viral Gastroenteritis (Stomach Flu)

### Definition

Viral gastroenteritis is an intestinal infection marked by watery diarrhoea, abdominal cramps, nausea or vomiting, and sometimes fever.

The most common way to develop viral gastroenteritis:



- ✚ Contact with an infected person
- ✚ Ingestion of contaminated water or food

### Signs and Symptoms

Viral gastroenteritis attacks your intestines causing signs and symptoms such as:

- ✚ Watery, usually non-bloody diarrhea- bloody diarrhea usually means you have a different, more severe infection
- ✚ Abdominal pain and cramps
- ✚ Nausea, vomiting or both
- ✚ Occasional muscle aches or headaches
- ✚ Low grade fever

Depending on the cause, viral gastroenteritis symptoms may appear within one to three days after you're infected and can range from mild to severe. Symptoms usually last just a day or two, but occasionally they may persist as long as 10 days.

### Causes

You're most likely to contract viral gastroenteritis when you eat or drink contaminated food or water, or if you share utensils, towels or food with someone who's infected.



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### Norovirus

Both children and adults are affected by noroviruses, the most common cause of food borne illness worldwide. Norovirus infection can sweep through families and communities. It's especially likely to spread among people in confined spaces. In most cases, you pick up the virus from contaminated food or water, although person-to-person transmission also is possible.

### Rotavirus

Worldwide, this gastroenteritis is most common when they put contaminated fingers or other objects into their mouths. The infection is most severe in infants and young children. Adults infected with rotavirus may not have symptoms, but can still spread the illness — of particular concern in institutional settings because infected adults unknowingly can pass the virus to others.



is the most common cause of viral gastroenteritis in children, who are usually infected with the virus into their mouths. most severe in infants and young children. Adults infected with rotavirus may not have symptoms, but can still spread the illness —

Some shellfish, especially raw or undercooked oysters, also can make you sick. Although contaminated drinking water is a cause of viral diarrhea, in many cases the virus is passed through the faecal-oral route — that is, someone with a virus handles food you eat without washing his or her hands after using the toilet.

### Risk Factors

**Young Children:** takes time for a child's immune system to mature. (day care or elementary)

**Older Adults:** immune system less efficient as we get older. Older adults in nursing homes, in particular, are vulnerable because their immune systems weaken and they live in close contact with others who may pass along germs.

**School Children:** Boarding schools, Camps: Anywhere that groups of people come together in close quarters can be an environment for an intestinal infection to get passed.



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**Persons with weakened immune systems:** If your resistance to infection is low — for instance, if your immune system is compromised by HIV/AIDS, chemotherapy or another medical condition — you may be especially at risk.

### Complications

The main complication of viral gastroenteritis is dehydration — a severe loss of water and essential salts and minerals. If you're healthy and drink enough to replace fluids you lose from vomiting and diarrhea, dehydration shouldn't be a problem.

Infants, older adults and people with suppressed immune systems may become severely dehydrated when they lose more fluids than they can replace. Hospitalization might be needed so that lost fluids can be replaced intravenously. Dehydration can be fatal, but rarely.

### Treatment and Drugs

There's often no specific medical treatment for viral gastroenteritis. Antibiotics aren't effective against viruses, and overusing them can contribute to the development of antibiotic-resistant strains of bacteria. Treatment initially consists of self-care measures.

### Lifestyles and Home Remedies

- ✦ **Let your stomach settle.** Stop eating solid foods for a few hours.
- ✦ **Try sucking on ice chips or taking small sips of water.** You might also try drinking clear soda, clear broths or non-caffeinated sports drinks. Drink plenty of liquid every day, taking small, frequent sips.
- ✦ **Ease back into eating.** Gradually begin to eat bland, easy-to-digest foods, such as soda crackers, toast, gelatine, bananas, rice and chicken. Stop eating if your nausea returns.



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- ✦ **Avoid certain foods and substances until you feel better.** These include dairy products, caffeine, alcohol, nicotine, and fatty or highly seasoned foods.
- ✦ **Get plenty of rest.** The illness and dehydration may have made you weak and tired.
- ✦ **Be cautious with medications.** Use many medications, such as ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin IB, others), sparingly if at all. They can make your stomach more upset. Use acetaminophen (Tylenol, others) cautiously; it sometimes can cause liver toxicity, especially in children. Don't give aspirin to children or teens because of the risk of Reye's syndrome, a rare, but potentially fatal disease. Before choosing a pain reliever or fever reducer discuss with your child's paediatrician.



### Prevention

- ✦ **Let your child vaccinated.** A vaccine against gastroenteritis caused by the rotavirus is available in some countries, including the United States. Given to children in the first year of life, the vaccine appears to be effective in preventing severe symptoms of this illness.
- ✦ **Wash your hands thoroughly.** And make sure your children do, too. If your children are older, teach them to wash their hands, especially after using the toilet. It's best to use warm water and soap and to rub hands vigorously for at least 20 seconds, remembering to wash around cuticles, beneath fingernails and in the creases of the hands. Then rinse thoroughly. Carry towelettes and hand sanitizer for times when soap and water aren't available.
- ✦ **Use separate personal items around your home.** Avoid sharing eating utensils, glasses and plates. Use separate towels in the bathroom.
- ✦ **Keep your distance.** Avoid close contact with anyone who has the virus, if possible.
- ✦ **Disinfect hard surfaces.** If someone in your home has viral gastroenteritis, disinfect hard surfaces, such as counters, faucets and doorknobs, with a mixture of two cups of bleach to one gallon of water.



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- ✦ **Check out your child care centre.** Make sure the centre has separate rooms for changing diapers and preparing or serving food. The room with the diaper-changing table should have a sink as well as a sanitary way to dispose of diapers.

### Take precautions when travelling

When you're travelling in other countries, you can become sick from contaminated food or water. You may be able to reduce your risk by following these tips:

- ✦ Drink only well-sealed bottled or carbonated water.
- ✦ Avoid ice cubes, because they may be made from contaminated water.
- ✦ Use bottled water to brush your teeth.
- ✦ Avoid raw food — including peeled fruits, raw vegetables and salads — that has been touched by human hands.
- ✦ Avoid undercooked meat and fish.

