

Rotavirus

A common cause of gastroenteritis, especially in children

What is it?

Rotavirus is the leading cause of gastroenteritis in young children. It can also affect adults. Most children will be infected in the first five years of life.

Rotavirus is easily spread on contaminated hands and objects, and when people eat food or drink fluids contaminated with the virus.

What are the symptoms?

Rotavirus usually starts with an upset stomach (nausea and vomiting), often with fever, followed by watery diarrhoea. It usually occurs one to three days after consumption of the virus.

Symptoms usually last from three to eight days and the person might still be infectious for 10 days after the start of the illness.

Symptoms can be mild and sometimes infected people have no symptoms.

How is it spread?

People become infected when they swallow the virus.

When people are ill, they excrete a large amount of rotavirus in their faeces.

Food can become contaminated if infected food handlers don't wash their hands well after toileting or changing children's nappies.

Contamination is relatively easy from hands, hard surfaces, toys, utensils and other contaminated objects in the environment.

Direct person to person spread might occur through direct contact or by inhaling airborne particles of virus released during breathing.

How is it treated?

There is no specific treatment to rid your body of the virus. Your immune system will overcome the virus, given time. Extra fluid (oral rehydration) is recommended to prevent dehydration, especially with young children.

However, a doctor should always be consulted if symptoms are severe as they may give further advice or treat specific symptoms. In severe infection, young children may require intravenous fluids in hospital.

Some immunity develops after infection, but people can get rotavirus infection again though it tends to be less severe.

How to prevent it?

Be careful when cleaning up after ill people. Vomit or faeces should be cleaned up using first a detergent solution then a solution of household chlorine bleach. Wash soiled items separately in warm or hot water. Dispose of nappies carefully.

Clean hands after contact with soiled articles, nappies, after going to the toilet and before handling food. Clean hands thoroughly. Clean hands are hands that are washed with soap and water for 20 seconds and thoroughly dried on a clean dry cloth towel or disposable paper towel for a further 20 seconds.

Prevent ill food handlers from preparing food at home and at work until 48 hours after all symptoms cease.

Keep children from households where there is rotavirus infection away from Early Childhood Education Centres and playgroups until 48 hours after symptoms cease.

Immunisation against rotavirus is very successful in preventing most rotavirus infections and almost all serious rotavirus illness. The vaccine is free on the National Immunisation Schedule for babies, since July 2017 this consists of a two dose course as drops into the mouth at the 6 week and 3 month immunisation visits.

Remember

- Strict hand hygiene is important. Clean hands properly (“20 seconds to wash, 20 seconds to dry”) after going to the toilet, before handling food and after touching anything that may be contaminated with rotavirus.
- Clean up properly and dispose of or wash soiled items carefully and hygienically.
- Cook food thoroughly - the virus dies when food is steaming hot.
- Avoid contact with infants, the elderly or those with long term illness until you are free of all symptoms.
- Don't handle food until you are free of all symptoms for at least 48 hours.

For general advice please contact Healthline on 0800 611 116

For information on immunisation call the Immunisation Advisory Centre on 0800 Immune or visit www.immune.org.nz

For further information contact the Auckland Regional Public Health Service on 09 623 4600

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