

Rotavirus



Rotavirus is the most common cause of diarrhea and vomiting in infants and young children. In fact, most children get rotavirus sometime before they are 5 years old. While many children have mild cases, others can get very sick. In the United States, rotavirus causes more than 70,000 hospitalizations each year. Read on to find out more about this common illness and what you can do to protect your children.

How is rotavirus spread?

Rotavirus can spread easily from person to person. The virus can stay active on hands and hard surfaces for a long time. This is why it can spread so easily in areas where there are a lot of children, like child care centers and preschools. Most cases occur during the winter months.

What are the symptoms of rotavirus?

Symptoms of rotavirus include

- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Watery diarrhea
- Fever (100.4°F/38°C)

After a few days the fever and vomiting stop, but the diarrhea can last for a week or more.

The diarrhea and vomiting from rotavirus can cause some children to become dehydrated. This is because the body loses too much water. Signs of dehydration include

- Dry lips and tongue
- Dry skin
- Fewer tears when crying
- Sunken eyes
- Sunken soft spot on the head (in an infant)
- No urinating for more than 8 hours (fewer wet diapers for an infant or fewer trips to the toilet for an older child)

Dehydration can be very serious, especially in very young infants, and should be treated right away.

How is rotavirus treated?

If your child is dehydrated, your pediatrician may recommend that you give her an electrolyte solution.

Electrolyte solutions are special fluids that have been designed to replace water and salts lost during diarrhea and vomiting. Your pediatrician or pharmacist can tell you what products are available. Use only commercially available fluids—brand-name and generic products are equally effective. Do not try to prepare them yourself.

Your pediatrician also will give you advice on what else your child can eat and drink.

If dehydration becomes severe, your child may need to be given fluids by vein (IV) in the hospital.

How can I protect my child from rotavirus?

There is no way to completely prevent your child from getting rotavirus, but there are things you can do to lower the risk.

Get the vaccine

There is a new vaccine that can prevent or lessen the severity of rotavirus. It is not a shot. The vaccine has 3 doses that are given by mouth at 2, 4, and 6 months of age. It can be given along with other vaccines. The side effects are usually mild and may include a few loose stools or an episode of vomiting.

There are children with certain health problems who should not get the rotavirus vaccine. Talk with your pediatrician if you are concerned about this.

Keep in mind, this vaccine only protects against diarrhea and vomiting caused by rotavirus, not from other illnesses.

Wash hands

Another way you can help prevent the spread of rotavirus (and other infections) is by making sure everyone in your family knows the proper way to wash their hands. Here's how:

1. Wet hands with warm running water.
2. Add soap. Rub hands together to make a soapy lather.
3. Lather the front and back of hands, between fingers, and under fingernails. Keep lathering for at least 10 seconds.
4. Rinse hands well under warm running water, letting the water run down to the fingertips.
5. Dry hands with a clean towel, using the towel to turn off the faucet.

You may also use a waterless hand cleaner in addition to hand washing or if soap and water are not available.

Keep areas clean

While many soaps and disinfectants will not kill the virus, it's still important to keep the areas where your children play as clean as possible. Use an alcohol-based cleaner to clean hard surfaces in your home. Be sure your child's school is kept clean. Also, be sure that dirty diapers are thrown away and kept away from children.

Is the vaccine safe?

You may have heard that a previous rotavirus vaccine was found to be unsafe. This is not the case with this new vaccine. This vaccine is made from different ingredients and has been found to be safe and effective in more extensive testing. It has been approved by the US Food and Drug Administration.

Why should I vaccinate my child?

Immunizing children against rotavirus is the best way to prevent the disease.

Just think, 3 doses of the vaccine can mean

- Less of a chance that your child will have a severe case of diarrhea or dehydration
 - Less of a chance that your child will be hospitalized with a severe case of diarrhea or dehydration
 - Fewer visits to the pediatrician
 - Less time away from work for parents
 - Less of a chance other members of your family will get rotavirus
- Talk with your pediatrician about getting your child vaccinated.

The information contained in this publication should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.

From your doctor

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