

Rotavirus

What is Rotavirus?

Rotavirus is a viral infection.

How is Rotavirus Spread?

In general, rotavirus is very contagious (easily spread), and is most common in infants and young children. Older children and adults can also become infected. Children are most likely to get rotavirus in the winter and spring (December through June).

People who are infected with rotavirus shed the virus in their feces (poop). The virus spreads when it enters a person's mouth to cause infection. Rotavirus can be spread by contaminated:

- hands
- objects (toys, surfaces)
- food
- water.

What are the Symptoms of Rotavirus?

Infants, children and those who have a weakened immune system who get infected may have:

- severe watery diarrhea, often with vomiting (throwing up)
- fever
- abdominal pain

- loss of appetite
- dehydration.

Vomiting and watery diarrhea can last from 3 to 8 days.

In older children and adults, a rotavirus infection may cause only mild symptoms or none at all.

Call your health care provider if you have:

- severe or bloody diarrhea
- blood in vomit
- temperature of 101 F or higher
- lethargy, irritability or abdominal pain
- signs of dehydration (dry mouth, crying without tears, little or no urine and unusual sleepiness).

How is Rotavirus Found?

Your health care provider will review your symptoms and give you a physical exam. A stool sample may be checked in a lab to confirm the diagnosis.

How is Rotavirus Treated?

There is no specific medicine or treatment for rotavirus.

Rotavirus infection can cause severe vomiting and diarrhea, which can lead to dehydration. The best way to protect against dehydration is to drink plenty of liquids. If you get severe dehydration you may need to stay in a hospital for treatment.

How Can Rotavirus be Prevented?

Wash your hands well with soap and water after changing a child's diaper, after using the bathroom and before eating or drinking.

Rotavirus vaccines are 85 to 98 percent effective in preventing severe rotavirus in infants and young children.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends infants get one of the two available vaccines:

- RotaTeq® (RV5), which is given in 3 doses at ages 2 months, 4 months, and 6 months; or
- Rotarix® (RV1), which is given in 2 doses at ages 2 months and 4 months.

Both rotavirus vaccines are given by mouth.

How Can You Keep From Spreading the Disease?

- To prevent the spread of rotavirus infection to other family members and close contacts, children and caregivers must **wash their hands well and often**. It is especially important to wash hands after diaper changes, after using the bathroom and before touching or eating food.
- It may also be helpful to wash any toys in the home with soap and water if they may have become contaminated with stool. Use a chloride bleach-based cleaner to wash surfaces.
- Avoid any food or water that is thought to be contaminated.

In the hospital, children with rotavirus need to stay in their room to prevent the spread of infection to others.

Children with rotavirus may return to group activities, including daycare, when all of the following occur:

- fever and vomiting are gone
- stool is not watery or leaking out of diapers
- the child is acting normally.

Information adapted from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.