



Central Michigan District Health Department
“Promoting Healthy Families, Healthy Communities”

For more information, call your local CMDHD branch office:

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www.cmdhd.org

Rotavirus

What is Rotavirus?

Rotavirus is a virus which causes irritation of the bowels. And almost all children have had a rotavirus infection by the time they are four or five years old with or without symptoms. Rotavirus commonly causes seasonal diarrhea in infants and young children, and sometimes is called “winter diarrhea”. In children ages three months to two years, rotavirus is one of the most common causes of gastroenteritis, and it often causes outbreaks of diarrhea in daycare centers and children’s hospitals.

What are the symptoms of Rotavirus?

Children with a rotavirus infection have fever, nausea and vomiting, and watery diarrhea. After two days, the fever and vomiting usually stop, but the diarrhea can continue for five to seven days. As with all viruses, some rotavirus infections cause few or no symptoms, especially in adults. However, the elderly may be affected due to their weaker immune system.

How is it spread?

Rotavirus infection is contagious. Rotavirus particles pass in the stool of infected persons **before and after** they have symptoms of the illness. Your child can catch a rotavirus infection if he/she puts his/her fingers in their mouth after touching something that has been contaminated by the stool of an infected person. Usually this happens when children forget to wash their hands often enough, especially before eating and after using the toilet. Because of the widespread nature of rotavirus and the fact that almost 100% of children get rotavirus illness, prevention of the spread of rotavirus is virtually impossible.

What is the home treatment?

When your child has a rotavirus infection, he/she can become dehydrated if he/she loses too much body water due to vomiting and watery diarrhea. Check for signs of dehydration, including: dry lips and tongue, dry skin, sunken eyes, fewer than six wet diapers a day, or (in an older child) too few trips to the bathroom to urinate. Call your doctor if you see any of these signs.

To keep your child from becoming dehydrated, follow your doctor’s guidance about what your child should eat and drink. Your doctor may suggest that you give your child special drinks that replace body fluids quickly, especially if the diarrhea has been going on for longer than two or three days. Some doctors suggest switching your child to a liquid diet until diarrhea passes. Other doctors believe that your child will get well faster if they get back to a normal diet as soon as possible. Follow your doctor’s guidance, and avoid giving your child store-bought medicines for vomiting or diarrhea unless your doctor recommends them.

When do I get professional treatment?

If your child is an infant or toddler and becomes dehydrated, he/she may need to be treated in a hospital to bring his/her body's water level back to normal. Most older children can be treated at home.

In some cases, your doctor may need to test your child's blood or stool to confirm that the diarrhea is being caused by rotavirus and not by bacteria. Since antibiotics do not work against illnesses caused by viruses, your doctor will not give your child antibiotics to treat a rotavirus infection.

Call your pediatrician whenever your child has signs of a rotavirus infection, including: watery diarrhea, fever, nausea, and vomiting. Call your doctor immediately if your child has these symptoms and seems to be dehydrated. Signs of dehydration include: dry lips and tongue, skin that is dry and pale, sunken eyes, infrequent urination, and (in infants), less than six wet diapers a day.