

Rotavirus

What is Rotavirus?

Rotavirus is a virus that can cause severe diarrhea, usually with fever and vomiting. Rotavirus is the most common cause of severe diarrhea among children and is also known to cause outbreaks among the elderly living in group settings. Virtually all children become infected with rotavirus in the first 3-5 years of life. Ongoing diarrhea can cause a loss of body fluids called dehydration. This is a very serious condition for young children and the elderly. It must be treated right away as it could be life-threatening.

What are the symptoms of Rotavirus?

Symptoms may include fever, vomiting, abdominal cramping and watery diarrhea. A cough and runny nose may be present. The illness usually lasts from 3 - 8 days. The virus lives in a newly infected person for 1 to 3 days before symptoms appear.

How does Rotavirus spread?

Once a person is infected it is passed from the body through feces. After going to the bathroom, poorly washed hands can spread the virus to food, dishes, other surfaces or directly to others. In this way, it can then be easily passed to other persons. It is also suggested that this virus may be able to spread through the air. This virus survives for long periods on hard surfaces, in contaminated water and on the hands.

How do you prevent Rotavirus Infections?

- **Hand washing is the best prevention.** Wash your hands thoroughly after using the washroom, changing diapers and before and after preparing or serving food.
- Wash your hands when entering and leaving a healthcare facility or daycare setting.
- Use an appropriate disinfectant on washroom surfaces and diaper change areas after each use. Many common disinfectants do not kill rotavirus.
- People ill with rotavirus-like symptoms should not handle food or care for others.
- Rotavirus vaccine is available and recommended for infants up to 24 weeks of age.

This fact sheet provides basic information only. It must not take the place of medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Always talk to a health care professional about any health concerns.

For further information contact the Infectious Disease Program at 625-8318
or toll free 1-888-294-6630, ext. 8318.

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