

Diarrhoea and vomiting among children at preschool

Information for those with children at preschool

Gastroenteritis, with diarrhoea and vomiting, is common among preschool children. The infection can be spread easily from one person to another, causing individuals who have been in close contact to become ill. If your child has had gastroenteritis, it is important to ensure they have had at least 48 hours without diarrhoea or vomiting and made a full recovery before returning to preschool.

Gastroenteritis, also referred to as a stomach bug or stomach flu, can develop rapidly and often clears up within a couple of days. If several children become ill at the same time or within a short period, and have similar symptoms, it is important to find out if there is a common source of infection in order to prevent more people from becoming ill.

Causes

A *virus* is the most common cause of gastroenteritis among preschool children. An infection caused by the calicivirus is sometimes known as the 'winter vomiting bug' even though you can become ill at any time of the year. Viral infections are very contagious and can often be passed on to several people within a very short time.

Diarrhoea could also be caused by *bacteria*, mainly salmonella, EHEC and other intestinal bacteria. With this type of intestinal infection, a fever is more common and vomiting less so. With bacterial gastroenteritis, there is a greater risk of becoming seriously ill than is the case if the gastroenteritis is caused by a virus.

If several children have diarrhoea over a longer period, *intestinal parasites* (such as giardia) could be the cause.

Infection routes

Infection is caused by infectious agents from faeces and vomiting entering the mouth. This takes place either through direct contact with individuals who are ill, or via contaminated surfaces (floors, towels, toys, door/cupboard handles and other objects). Unclean hands are a common way for an infection to spread. You can also be infected via food and beverages that are prepared or handled incorrectly. The infection can even be passed on through aerosols (small droplets in the air) that are spread when someone vomits. The bacteria that cause the infection can survive for several days in food that has not been heated up, or on contaminated objects.

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Incubation period (the time from infection to illness)

In the case of gastroenteritis caused by a virus, it often takes 1-3 days from being infected until you become ill. If it is caused by something else, it could take longer.

Hygiene

- Make sure you practise good hand hygiene.
- Wash your hands with soap and water after visiting the toilet, after changing a nappy, and before meals.
- Do not handle food if you are ill.
- Put the toilet seat down before flushing.
- Place soiled nappies in a plastic bag, tie the bag securely, and dispose of it immediately
- Keep hand basins, taps, toilet seats and flush buttons clean.

Treatment

It is important that children with watery diarrhoea, or who vomit frequently, drink plenty of fluids. Most infections clear up without treatment although in some cases some form of treatment could be necessary.

Should your child stay at home?

Yes. Children with gastroenteritis (diarrhoea or vomiting) should not go to preschool. Diarrhoea means the passing of three or more loose stools per day. Your child can return to preschool once they have begun eating normally and have not vomited or had diarrhoea for at least 48 hours. During times when gastroenteritis is going around, the spread of the illness at the preschool can be limited by keeping the siblings of sick children at home.

Diarrhoea after spending time abroad

In the case of diarrhoea or other stomach disorders after spending time abroad, contact your medical centre for possible tests before your child returns to preschool. Even in these cases it is important to ensure they have had at least 48 hours without diarrhoea or vomiting and made a full recovery.

Note

If you notify the preschool quickly that your child is ill, it could help limit the spread of infection and prevent outbreaks.

For further information, see 1177 Healthcare Guide <https://www.1177.se/Vastra-Gotaland/Fakta-och-rad/Sjukdomar/Magsjuka---diarre-och-krakningar/>

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