

Viral Gastroenteritis

FACT SHEET

What is Viral Gastroenteritis?

Gastroenteritis means inflammation of the stomach and small and large intestines. Viral gastroenteritis is an infection caused by a variety of viruses that results in vomiting or diarrhea. Some of the viruses that can cause gastroenteritis include rotaviruses, adenoviruses, caliciviruses, astroviruses, Norwalk virus, and a group of Norwalk-like viruses.

Who Can Get Viral Gastroenteritis?

Viral gastroenteritis affects people in all parts of the world. Viral gastroenteritis outbreaks can occur in institutional settings, such as schools, child care facilities, and nursing homes. Or in other group settings, such as banquet halls, cruise ships, dormitories, and campgrounds. Food can be contaminated by infected food handlers especially if they do not wash their hands after using the toilet. Shellfish and drinking water can be contaminated by sewage. The viruses are also spread by close contact with infected people.

What are the Symptoms?

The symptoms of viral gastroenteritis may include:

- Diarrhea (non-bloody)
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Stomach cramps
- Headache
- Fever
- Chills
- Muscle ache

Symptoms begin 1 to 2 days following infection with a virus. The illness usually lasts between 12 and 60 hours.

What is the Treatment?

There are no drugs to cure viral gastroenteritis. It is important to drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration.

How Can You Prevent Viral Gastroenteritis?

You can reduce your chance of getting infected by:

- Frequent hand washing after using the toilet and before preparing or eating food.
- Avoid eating raw or undercooked shellfish.
- Avoid drinking water from lakes, streams and rivers.
- Keep household surfaces clean, such as sinks, countertops, etc.