



Rotavirus

What is rotavirus?

Rotavirus is a virus that can cause gastroenteritis.

Who gets rotavirus?

Rotavirus disease is most common in infants and young children. Children are most likely to get rotavirus in the winter and spring (December through June). Older children and adults can also become infected with rotavirus.

Once a person has been exposed to rotavirus, it takes about 2 days for the symptoms to appear.

What are the symptoms of rotavirus?

Children who get infected may have severe watery diarrhea, often with vomiting, fever, and abdominal pain. Vomiting and watery diarrhea can last from 3 to 8 days. Additional symptoms include loss of appetite and dehydration (loss of body fluids), which can be especially harmful for infants and young children. Symptoms of dehydration include decrease in urination, dry mouth and throat and feeling dizzy when standing up. A dehydrated child may also cry with few or no tears and be unusually sleepy or fussy.

Adults who get rotavirus disease tend to have milder symptoms.

How can I protect myself against rotavirus?

Rotavirus vaccines are very effective in preventing severe rotavirus disease in infants and young children.

Children, even those that are vaccinated, may develop rotavirus disease more than once. Neither natural infection with rotavirus nor rotavirus vaccination provides full protection from future infections. Usually a person's first infection with rotavirus causes the most severe symptoms.

How can I prevent the spread of rotavirus?

Rotavirus spreads easily among infants and young children and to family members and other people with whom they have close contact.

People who are infected with rotavirus pass it in their feces (stool). The virus must be passed from an infected person's stool and then enter another person's mouth to cause infection. This can happen by touching contaminated objects or surfaces then putting your fingers in your mouth and by consuming contaminated food and liquids.

Thus, good hygiene (handwashing) and cleanliness are important.

How can I treat rotavirus?

There is no drug to treat rotavirus infection. Antibiotic drugs will not help because antibiotics fight against bacteria not viruses.

The best way to protect against dehydration is to drink plenty of liquids. Oral rehydration solutions that you can get over the counter in food and drug stores are most helpful for mild dehydration. Severe dehydration may require hospitalization for treatment with intravenous (IV) fluids, which are given to patients directly through their veins. If you think you or someone you are caring for is severely dehydrated, contact a health care provider.

Should people with rotavirus go to school or work?

The virus is passed most when the person is sick and during the first 3 days after they recover from rotavirus disease.

People with rotavirus infection should stay home from school or work until at least 48 hours after the last time they have had symptoms such as diarrhea and/or vomiting.

Adapted from:
"Rotavirus." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014
(<http://www.cdc.gov/rotavirus/index.html>)