

# Rotavirus

## Community and Public Health

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Web: [www.cph.co.nz](http://www.cph.co.nz)

Rotavirus is a virus which causes gastrointestinal illness (vomiting and diarrhoea) and is highly infectious.

It is easily spread if people don't wash and dry their hands properly after going to the toilet or changing nappies

People of any age can become infected. Rotavirus is a very common viral cause of diarrhoea in children aged 6 to 24 months.

### What are the symptoms?

The following symptoms usually occur from 1 to 3 days after exposure to the virus and generally last for 4 to 6 days:

- Diarrhoea;
- Vomiting;
- Fever; and
- Abdominal pain.

Young children can become dehydrated and may need to be seen by a doctor. You should also see your doctor if symptoms are severe or the illness doesn't improve.



### How is it caught or spread?

Rotavirus is passed in the faeces (poo) of infected people and enters the body through a person's mouth.

People become infected by:

- consuming food or drink contaminated by an infected person.
- touching contaminated toys and hard surfaces.
- an infected person sneezing and coughing.

People are most infectious while they have diarrhoea. The virus can be present in the faeces (poo) for up to 10 days after the onset of symptoms.

### How is it treated?

Rotavirus cannot be treated with antibiotics. The symptoms may be relieved by:

- Drinking plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration; and
- Taking paracetamol to reduce fever or pain.

### How is spread prevented?

A vaccine for rotavirus is available free as part of the National Immunisation Schedule at given to babies at 6 weeks, 3 months and 5 months. The vaccine is simply squirted into your baby's mouth.

### *From person to person*

Frequent and thorough hand washing with plenty of soap and water will prevent the spread. Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water:

- After changing children's nappies or going to the toilet.
- Before touching food.
- Before eating or feeding infants and children.

Do not prepare food for others for at least 48 hours after all symptoms have cleared.

### *From the environment*

- Surfaces should be washed with soap and water before disinfecting.
- Chlorine-based household bleaches will kill rotavirus and help prevent spread from objects and surfaces in the environment.
- Always follow the manufacturers' directions for dilution.
- Remove and wash all contaminated linen and clothes with hot water and detergent

## **Staying away from work, school or preschool**

Infected people should stay home from work, school, or early childhood centres until they have been free of symptoms for at least 48 hours.

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### **Other resources available on infectious illnesses:**

- Campylobacter, E. coli and Salmonella
- Cryptosporidium and Giardia
- Norovirus
- Yersiniosis

*Image sourced from the Pinky Cloud website.*

## **Community and Public Health: Community Health Information Centres**

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