

Acute Viral Gastroenteritis

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Acute viral gastroenteritis is a stomach illness of sudden onset that lasts for one or more days. It is commonly caused by a virus called norovirus.

How people get the virus

People become infected by:

- Close contact with a person who has norovirus
- cleaning up the vomit or diarrhoea from an infected person,
- eating shellfish from areas contaminated by human sewage,
- food handled by an infected person
- touching surfaces contaminated with viruses.

The virus is very easily spread within homes, schools, rest homes and hospitals.

What are the symptoms?

The most common symptoms are nausea, stomach cramps, diarrhoea and vomiting. Headaches, chills and aching muscles may also occur. Dehydration may be a problem in young babies and the elderly.

If norovirus is the cause symptoms usually appear 10-50 hours after contact with the virus and usually last 12-72 hours.

Treatment of gastroenteritis

Viral gastroenteritis cannot be treated with antibiotics.

Drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration while the diarrhoea lasts – this is most important for infants. See information on preventing and treating dehydration in the “Well Child Tamariki Ora Health Book” by the Ministry of Health.

See your doctor if vomiting or diarrhoea is severe, or the affected person does not improve.

Return to work, preschool/school

Usually adults can go back to work and children can return to early childhood centres or school, once they are symptom-free for 48 hours. Virus particles may still be present in faeces for a week or longer.

Stopping gastroenteritis spreading

Viral gastroenteritis is very infectious and all members in a home with an affected person need to wash their hands regularly.

Preparing food: Those affected should stay out of the kitchen and not prepare food for others, while they are sick and for at least 48 hours after symptoms have cleared. Cook food thoroughly (as the virus is killed by heat) and

don't eat shellfish from contaminated areas.

Food handlers: You need to discuss the situation with your employer if someone in your household has gastroenteritis. This is because the virus can be passed on, even if a person has no symptoms.

Contact with others: Stay away from others if you or someone in your household is sick, especially rest homes. Wash hands and under fingernails thoroughly with soap, rinse, and dry with a clean towel:

- when caring for people with gastroenteritis
- after using the toilet
- changing a baby's nappy, and
- before and after preparing food.

Cleaning your home

Viruses can survive outside the body. Surfaces in the home should be cleaned using hot water and detergent, as well as disinfected regularly. This is especially important for bathrooms, toilets, door handles or any contaminated area.

- Use a chlorine-based cleaning agent (for example **bleach with sodium hypochlorite**). Follow the instructions on the container or see the table below.
- Always check that it is safe to use bleach on surfaces first before using. Allow **30 minutes** contact time.
- Wash contaminated linen and clothes with hot water and detergent.
- Use disposable gloves and paper towels, and discard.
- Disinfect mops and other cleaning equipment.

Making up a solution of disinfectant

| To make one cup (250 ml) of 0.1% bleach-based cleaning solution | | |
|---|--|---|
| 1. Strength of bleach (% sodium hypochlorite) on label of purchased solution. | 2. Volume of bleach to add to a container to make up 0.1% solution. | 3. Volume of water to add to make 250 ml of cleaning solution. |
| 1% | 25 ml | 225 ml |
| 2% | 13 ml | 237 ml |
| 3% | 9 ml | 241 ml |
| 4% | 7 ml | 243ml |
| 5% | 5 ml | 245ml |