

Public Health Agency Northern Ireland

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**GASTROENTERITIS INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARENTS
& CARERS**

WHAT IS GASTROENTERITIS?

Gastroenteritis is commonly caused by viral infections resulting in vomiting and diarrhoea. It can be caused by a number of different viruses, such as rotavirus and norovirus. There are many other uncommon causes of gastroenteritis including bacteria, toxins, parasites etc.

WHY IS IT A PROBLEM?

The main symptoms of viral gastroenteritis are vomiting and watery diarrhoea. Other symptoms may include nausea, fever, abdominal pain, headache, and muscle aches. Symptoms can take between one and three days to develop and usually last between one and two days, sometimes longer. Some people may also have a raised temperature, headache or aching limbs.

Viral gastroenteritis is very infectious and can spread easily in school settings due to the close contact between children and staff. Large numbers of students and staff can be involved. It is important to stop the illness from spreading further between children and also to relatives and friends.

HOW DOES THIS AFFECT MY CHILD?

If your child(ren) do become unwell, you will be asked to keep them off school until they have been well for 48 hours.

WILL MY CHILD NEED TREATMENT?

The main treatment is making sure your child(ren) drink plenty of fluid so that they do not become dehydrated. If they develop diarrhoea and vomiting, a faecal (poo) sample may be requested for laboratory testing. The illness is usually mild in nature and gets better without any further treatment. If you have any concerns regarding your child symptoms contact your GP for advice.

HOW DO I REDUCE SPREAD TO OTHER PEOPLE IN OUR HOME?

Thorough hand washing with soap and warm water after going to the toilet and before eating helps to stop the transmission of viral gastroenteritis, as well as other bugs.

Extra cleaning of your home is recommended with particular attention to the toilets. These should be cleaned with household detergent and warm water. Particular attention should also be paid to flush handles, sink taps, door handles and light switches. The cleaning cloths you use should be disposable.

HOW DO I CLEAN UP AFTER ACCIDENTS?

When cleaning up vomit or faeces paper towels or toilet roll should be used initially. The area should then be cleaned using warm soapy water and a disposable cloth before being disinfected with regular household detergent. You should immediately dispose of all materials and hand washing after cleaning is essential.