



## Frequently asked questions about

### Rotavirus

**From the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency**

#### **What is Rotavirus?**

Rotavirus is the most common cause of severe diarrhea among children, resulting in the hospitalization of approximately 55,000 children each year in the United States and 200,000 to 400,000 Emergency Room visits as well. Every year, our tri-county area receives hundreds of reports of gastro-intestinal illness, many of which are probably rotavirus.

#### **What are the signs and symptoms?**

Children with a rotavirus infection have fever, nausea, and vomiting, which are often followed by abdominal cramps and frequent, watery diarrhea. Children who are infected may also have a cough and runny nose. As with all viruses, though, some rotavirus infections cause few or no symptoms, especially in adults. These symptoms usually last about 3-8 days.

#### **How is it spread?**

The virus passes in the stool of infected persons before and after they have symptoms of the illness. As you have probably guessed, it is **VERY** contagious. Children and adults can become infected if they put their fingers in their mouths or eat something after they have touched something that has been contaminated by the stool of an infected person. Usually this happens when children forget to [wash their hands](#) often enough, especially before eating and after using the toilet. This also points out the critical need for foodservice workers to wash their hands after using the restroom, and daycare workers to wash their hands often, and especially after changing a diaper.

#### **If I have rotavirus, how long until I am contagious?**

The incubation period for rotavirus disease is approximately 2 days. You are not immune to getting rotavirus again after getting it the first time, but repeat infections are often less severe than the original infection. Adults can also be infected, though the disease tends to be mild.

#### **How is this disease treated once I have it?**

Your doctor may need to test your child's blood, urine, or [stool](#) to confirm that the diarrhea is being caused by rotavirus and not by bacteria. Because antibiotics do not work against illnesses caused by viruses, your doctor will not give your child antibiotics to treat a rotavirus infection.

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### **Home Treatment**

To prevent dehydration, follow your doctor's guidance about what your child should eat and drink. Your doctor may suggest that you give your child special drinks that replace body fluids, especially if the diarrhea has been going on for longer than 2 or 3 days. In general, kids with mild diarrhea who are not dehydrated should continue to eat normally but should receive more fluids. (Fruit juices and soft drinks can make diarrhea worse and should be avoided – remember that clear liquid we all used to drink - WATER). Children who are breastfed should be breastfed throughout. A child who is vomiting will need to eat smaller amounts more frequently. Follow your doctor's guidance and avoid giving your child store-bought medicines for vomiting or diarrhea unless your doctor recommends them.

### **Is there a vaccine for this disease?**

A new live, oral (no shot!!) vaccine (RotaTeq) has been licensed for use in protecting children. This is a 3-dose series available free to children who are eligible through the Vaccine for Children either at your local health department or your provider. Rotavirus is relatively resistant to commonly used disinfectants but is inactivated by chlorine. In day care, dressing infants with overalls to cover diapers has been demonstrated to decrease transmission of the infection.

### **Other Prevention Tips**

In day Care, food service establishments and even at home preparing your families meals, GOOD HANDWASHING goes a long way in the prevention of many communicable diseases and rotavirus is no different. In restaurants, thorough washing of fresh fruits and vegetables will also help prevent the spread of many contagious diseases. In day care and adult care centers, frequent hand washing is a must.

For information about other health issues in our tri-county area and around the world, visit our web site at:

[www.bhsj.org](http://www.bhsj.org)

**Or contact us at any of our 4 office locations at:**

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