

GASTROENTERITIS

What is Gastroenteritis?

Gastroenteritis means inflammation of the stomach, small intestines and large intestines. It is often referred to as the “stomach flu,” but influenza viruses are not responsible.

How do People get Gastroenteritis?

Many different viruses, bacteria and parasites can be responsible, including Rotaviruses, Noroviruses, Salmonella, E.Coli, and Giardia.

Methods of transmission depend on the cause but frequently include:

- Handling or consuming contaminated food or water.
- Touching a contaminated surface and then placing your hands or fingers in or near your mouth.
- Having close or direct contact with another person infected or showing symptoms.

Some cases of Gastroenteritis are extremely contagious and can spread rapidly—especially in day-care centers, nursing homes and other residential facilities. Precautions should be taken anytime someone is showing symptoms, and an individual can remain contagious 3 days or more after symptoms end.

Symptoms of Gastroenteritis

Symptoms can begin a few hours to 3 days after exposure and commonly include nausea, stomach cramps, vomiting and diarrhea (which can be severe, bloody or watery). In some cases, individuals may also develop a low-grade fever, chills or a headache.

Diagnosis and Treatment of Gastroenteritis

In order to determine the cause of Gastroenteritis, your provider will need a stool sample. Often, determining the cause of the infection can help to stop or prevent an outbreak of the illness, so it is important to talk to your provider about getting tested if you experience any symptoms.

Treatment of Gastroenteritis is focused mainly on keeping the individual hydrated. Excessive vomiting and diarrhea can lead to dehydration, especially in the young, the old and those with compromised immune systems. Lost fluids should be replaced with small, frequent offerings of clear fluids. If an individual exhibits signs of dehydration—dry mouth, little or no urination, crying with no tears or sleepiness or unresponsiveness—see a medical provider immediately.

Antibiotics may treat certain bacterial infections, but should NOT be used as a treatment for Gastroenteritis unless the source of infection has been laboratory identified and a doctor has been consulted. In some cases, medication may be prescribed to help stop or reduce vomiting.

How Can I Prevent Gastroenteritis?

Frequent, proper hand washing, using hand sanitizer and disinfecting surfaces regularly are good ways to prevent some of the viruses and bacteria that cause Gastroenteritis. Other good prevention habits include:

- Practicing safe food handling procedures.
- Not consuming under or uncooked food.
- Ensuring the water you drink, especially while outdoors, has been properly sterilized.
- Asking pool operators about their health and safety procedures.



**For more information on gastroenteritis,
please contact a public health nurse at
City-County Health Department at 454-6950 or
visit www.cchdmt.org.**

CLEANING AFTER AN ILLNESS

FACT SHEET

Gastroenteritis (GI illnesses), such as Rotavirus, noroviruses, E. coli and giardia, cause vomiting, nausea and diarrhea. These illnesses can be quite contagious, so cleaning during and after a bout of gastroenteritis is very important. In order to fully kill viruses and bacteria, you need to be sure that you are cleaning correctly.

- Cleaning—removing visible dirt, soil and other debris, usually by using a mild detergent and water
- Sanitizing—reducing the number of bacterial contaminants to safe levels
- Disinfecting—the destruction of bacteria and viruses on surfaces

What to Clean

Any frequently touched surfaces, such as countertops, doorknobs, hand washing sinks/facilities, toys and food preparation tools and surfaces should be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected. Bed linens, towels and soiled clothing should also be cleaned thoroughly.

When to Clean

Cleaning should take place each day that symptoms are present. Some viruses that cause gastroenteritis can still be contagious after symptoms disappear. Diligent cleaning should continue for up to three days after the illness ends.



What to Use and How to Clean

A chlorine bleach solution is the best way to disinfect nonporous surfaces.

Application	Bleach per Gallon Water	Directions
Dishes, eating utensils and mouthed toys	1 teaspoon	Submerge items in solution for at least one minute, rinse with clean water
Tables, food prep areas, cots	1 tablespoon	Wipe or spray on surface, let stand for 2 minutes, wipe in concentric circles
Diaper changing areas, toys, toilets, surfaces contaminated with bodily secretions/excretions	1/4 cup	Wipe or spray on surface, air dry, rinse with clean water, air dry

Consider wearing gloves and protective eyewear when using strong bleach solutions and to protect against the splash or spray of potentially infectious materials. Bleach solution should be prepared daily and discarded after use. Open bottles of chlorine bleach use their effectiveness after 30 days; ensure that the bleach you use is fresh.

Other products may be used to clean or sanitize, but not all may be able to disinfect. For example, Clorox® wipes can destroy Salmonella and H1N1, but not other viruses, like Rotavirus or Noroviruses.

Place porous items, such as bedding, linens and soft toys, in a bag as soon as possible after contamination. Wash with detergent and hot water at 140-160°F, then dry completely at the highest heat setting possible.

For more information on cleaning, disinfecting and sanitizing, contact an Environmental Health Sanitarian at City-County Health Department at 454-6950.