



## Rotaviral Enteritis “Rotavirus”

### What is rotavirus?

Rotavirus infections, “stomach viruses,” are the most common cause of severe diarrhea in children, especially in children under two years old. The infection usually starts with a fever and is followed by three or more days of watery diarrhea and vomiting. The diarrhea may be severe, leading to dehydration. Children with rotavirus infections usually do not have high fever, bloody diarrhea or severe cramping abdominal pain. Children usually develop symptoms about one to three days after having contact with someone who is infected.

Rotavirus infections may be highly contagious and occur seasonally. Infections are most common in autumn through spring, reaching a peak in the winter. Although it is possible to get a rotavirus infection more than once, future infections are usually milder than the first one.

### How is rotavirus spread?

Rotavirus is present in the stool of the infected child and can be passed by hand to mouth if there has been contact with the stool. It can also be transmitted by indirect contact, such as on a toy.

### How is rotavirus diagnosed?

While there are tests available to check for rotavirus in the stool, they are not routinely performed. Since there is no treatment and most children recover on their own, there is usually no reason to confirm that a case of acute diarrhea is caused by the rotavirus. However, testing for rotavirus is often performed in children with multiple symptoms or prolonged diarrhea. In these cases, detecting a rotavirus infection can help rule out other more serious infections caused by parasites or bacteria.

### How is rotavirus treated?

Diarrhea usually lasts about three to seven days in most children with a rotavirus infection, but some episodes may last as long as two weeks. There is no cure or medication for rotavirus infections, but providing extra fluids to drink is recommended to prevent dehydration.

Fluids that are good for children with diarrhea and vomiting include unflavored or flavored oral rehydration solutions, such as Pedialyte®, Infalyte or Kaolectrolyte, some of which are also available as popsicles. These fluids have the right amount of water, sugar and salt for your child. Other choices, such as sports drinks, soft drinks, juices or Kool-Aid, have too much sugar and can make the diarrhea worse. Plain water, tea or chicken broth should not be given alone, but in combination with rehydration solutions.

### How is rotavirus prevented?

A new vaccine to prevent rotavirus infections in infants, RotaTeq, was made available in early 2006. The vaccine is given by mouth in three doses, at 2 months, 4 months and 6 months of age.

Rotavirus can also be prevented by:

- Careful handwashing, especially after using the restroom, changing a child’s diaper or helping a child use the restroom.
- Proper diaper changing.

- Sanitizing environmental surfaces that may have come into contact with a toddler's hands, mouth or stool (tables, chairs, toys, etc.).
- Proper disposal of diapers.

### **School/Child Care Precautions**

Children with rotavirus infection should be excluded from the child care center while having symptoms. School attendance should be based on health care provider's recommendation.

For more information call the Guilford County Department of Public Health at 336-641-7777 or visit [www.myguilford.com](http://www.myguilford.com)