



One minute guide to...

Diarrhoea and vomiting (gastroenteritis)

What is it?

People affected by **infectious gastroenteritis** usually have symptoms such as diarrhoea, vomiting (which can be projectile) and nausea (feeling sick). Diarrhoea is defined as 3 or more liquid or semi-liquid stools within a 24-hour period. Other symptoms can include a high temperature, loss of appetite, abdominal pain, or aching limbs. Diarrhoea usually stops within 5-7 days and vomiting usually stops in 1-2 days.

How is it spread?

The bugs that cause gastroenteritis can spread very easily from person to person when the germs enter the gut by the mouth. This can happen when:

- contaminated hands, objects or food/drinks are put in the mouth,
- people have close contact with someone who is infected (small particles of vomit can become airborne and enter the mouth).

A person is most infectious from when their symptoms start until 48 hours after all their symptoms have passed, and sometimes for a short time before and after this.

Actions to take if you have cases in your setting

- Children and adults with diarrhoea or vomiting should stay off school until 48 hours after symptoms have stopped and they are well enough to return. The most important thing is for them to rest at home and have lots of fluids to avoid dehydration.
- Increase measures to reduce the spread:
 - Encourage everyone to wash their hands often with soap and water, especially after using the toilet (or changing nappies) and before eating, preparing, or handling food. Be aware that alcohol hand gels do not kill bugs that can cause diarrhoea and vomiting.
 - Disinfect surfaces that could be contaminated including high touch points, kitchens, and toilets. Surfaces contaminated by vomit or diarrhoea need to be cleaned with a solution containing diluted bleach.
 - Clothes and soft toys with vomit or diarrhoea stains should be removed as soon as possible and washed separately on a hot wash cycle. Soft furnishings and carpets should be steam cleaned.
 - Keep rooms well ventilated where possible.
 - Minimise the sharing of equipment (such as I-pads and pencils) between children.

Further Information

NHS information: [Norovirus \(vomiting bug\) - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk); [Diarrhoea and vomiting - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk)