

Gastroenteritis

Advice for parents and carers of children aged 5 years old and under.



About gastroenteritis

Gastroenteritis is a common condition where the stomach and bowel become inflamed. It is usually caused by a viral or bacterial infection and can usually be managed at home.

The two main symptoms of gastroenteritis are diarrhoea and vomiting, which usually clear up in around five to seven days. Other symptoms include nausea (feeling sick) and stomach cramps/pain, and sometimes a raised temperature. Fortunately most cases of gastroenteritis can be managed at home.

One of the main risks of gastroenteritis in children and especially babies is dehydration, which is when the body doesn't have enough water or the right balance of salts to carry out its normal functions. If the dehydration becomes severe it can be dangerous.

Warning signs that your child is dehydrated

It is important that your child does not get dehydrated. Signs of dehydration include:

- A dry mouth,
- no tears,
- sunken eyes,
- the soft spot (fontanelle) at the top of your baby's head is more dipped in than usual,
- your child's nappy remains dry or they have not passed urine for around 6-8 hours,
- poor overall appearance, lethargy, unexpected drowsiness or breathing problems.

How long will my child be ill?

Diarrhoea usually lasts five to seven days but may continue for up to two weeks. Vomiting usually does not last for more than three days. If your child's symptoms are taking longer than this to get better you should contact your GP or Health Visitor.

Caring for your child at home

If your child is not dehydrated (see warning signs) and does not have any red or amber box symptoms in the traffic light advice then you can care for your child at home.

Give fluids - little and often

The most important thing is to replace fluid as your child will be losing it from their vomiting and/or diarrhoea.

Keep feeding them as normal (for example breast milk) and offer plenty of drinks. Fruit juice and fizzy drinks should be discouraged, because they can make diarrhoea worse.

Your healthcare professional, for instance your doctor may recommend that you give your child a special fluid known as Oral Rehydration Solution (ORS) such as Dioralyte or Electrolade. This can help prevent dehydration from occurring. It is also used to treat children who have become dehydrated.

Oral Rehydration Solution (ORS) is made up from sachets of powder which have to be mixed with water and stored according to the directions on the packet. You can add additional squash (not "sugar-free") as flavouring: it works well with blackcurrant squash.

Do not give your child anti-diarrhoeal drugs as they can be dangerous.

Under one year old

For a child under 1 year old you can give small sips every few minutes (or by a teaspoon or a plastic syringe of 5mls every 5 minutes). With the plastic syringe aim the fluids into the side of the baby's mouth as they may swallow it more easily then.

For older children

Older children can sometimes be persuaded to take fluids by offering them ice lollies. For all children, give drinks little and often e.g. every 10 minutes. It is useful to keep a record of the number of drinks that your child has had and the number of wees, poos and vomits while they are unwell.

Suitable fluids to give to your children

✓ Fluids	✗ Fluids
<p>First choice - Oral Rehydration Solution such as Dioralyte or Electrolade.</p> <p>Give:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Squash (not "sugar-free")• Milk• Water	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fruit juices• Fizzy drinks (as they can make diarrhoea worse) 

REMEMBER:

Children's health can quickly improve or deteriorate rapidly. Trust your instincts if you are worried please contact 111 or speak to your child's GP.

Preventing the spread of gastroenteritis

Do - wash your hands

The most effective way is for you and your child to wash your hands with liquid soap ideally in warm running water and then dry them carefully. Always do this:

- After going to the toilet,
- after changing nappies, and
- before touching food.



Do not - allow your child to:

- Share towels with anyone,
- go to school or any other childcare facility until 48 hours after the last episode of diarrhoea and / or vomiting, or
- swim in swimming pools until 2 weeks after the diarrhoea has stopped.



What do I do if my child has gastroenteritis?



RED

If your child...

- becomes unresponsive, or
- is breathing faster than usual, or
- has unusually pale or mottled skin, or
- has cold extremities (colder hands and feet than usual).



You need emergency help

Call 999 or go straight to the nearest hospital Emergency (A&E) Department.

Your nearest hospitals (open 24 hours, 7 days a week):

- Frimley Park, Surrey
- Hillingdon Hospital
- John Radcliffe, Oxford
- Milton Keynes Hospital
- Royal Berkshire, Reading
- Stoke Mandeville Hospital, Aylesbury
- Wexham Park Hospital, Slough.



AMBER

If your child...

- is getting more thirsty despite drinking, or
- is not drinking, or
- has signs of dehydration or
- has blood in their poo, or
- has had 6 or more episodes of diarrhoea in 24 hours, or
- has vomited 3 or more times in 24 hours, or
- has a high temperature, or
- is in constant pain, or
- appears to be getting worse, or
- if you are worried.



You need to contact a nurse or doctor today

Please telephone your GP surgery or, if it is closed, call **NHS 111**.



GREEN

If your child...

Has none of the symptoms listed in the red and amber boxes above.



Self-care

You can care for your child at home using the advice on this leaflet.

If you feel you need more advice, please contact your Health Visitor, GP Surgery or your local pharmacy.

Find links to these at www.nhs.uk

You can also call **NHS 111** for advice.

Some useful information

If you need advice please try:

Your local pharmacy can be found at www.nhs.uk

Health Visitor:.....

Your GP Surgery:.....

Please contact your GP when the surgery is open or call **NHS 111** when the GP surgery is closed. **NHS 111** provides advice for urgent care needs. It is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls from landlines and mobile phones are free.

NHS Choices: www.nhs.uk for online advice and information

Buckinghamshire - Family Information Service

Email: familyinfo@buckscc.gov.uk

Tel: 01296 383065 **Text:** 07786 202920

Web: www.bucksfamilyinfo.org

Berkshire - Slough Family Information Service

Tel: 01753 476 589 **Web:** www.serviceguide.slough.gov.uk

Windsor, Ascot and Maidenhead

Tel: 01628 683 800 **Web:** www.rbwm.gov.uk

The Children and Young People Urgent Care Advisory Group is made up of child health specialists from across the NHS and partner agencies such as the Local Authority and is led by Aylesbury Vale and Chiltern NHS Clinical Commissioning Groups. We are a cross-organisational and multi-specialist group working to improve child health.

This leaflet has been produced after careful consideration of the evidence available including but not exclusively from NICE, SIGN, EBM data and the NHS.

