



Discharge Information – Gastroenteritis

What is Gastroenteritis ?

- Gastroenteritis ('gastro') is a bowel infection which causes diarrhoea (runny, watery poo) and sometimes vomiting. The vomiting usually only lasts for a day or two but the diarrhoea can last for up to 10 days.
- Your child may not feel like eating or drinking due to stomach pains, nausea (feeling sick) or fever.
- Gastro is most commonly caused by a virus, so antibiotics are not usually given.
- Gastro can be more severe in babies and young children.

The treatment for gastro is to prevent and treat dehydration (loss of too much fluid from the body).

How to manage gastro at home?

1 Restart normal fluids and diet as soon as possible

- Give your child their normal amount of fluid to drink.
- Water, half strength apple juice *choose brands that are pure apple juice or apple juice made from concentrate* (i.e. half water, half clear apple juice), breast milk, formula or cows milk are all suitable.
- Sugary drinks should be avoided – this makes diarrhoea worse.
- Giving smaller drinks more often may help to reduce nausea and vomiting.
- Given them their normal diet as soon as possible. There is no need to exclude foods.
- If they don't want to eat food, there is no need for concern **as long as they drink their normal amount of fluid.**

2 Replace fluids lost from diarrhoea and vomiting

If your child continues to have **large** episodes of diarrhoea or vomiting, they need extra fluid. Pedalyte™, half strength apple juice (i.e. half water, half clear apple juice), or breast milk is better than plain water for this (but water is better than nothing).

- For infants (under 1 year), offer them an extra drink (100ml) or breastfeed after each **large** loose bowel motion/vomit.
- For older children, offer them at least one cup of fluid (250ml) after each **large** loose bowel motion/vomit.

What to do if they keep vomiting or start vomiting again

- Try offering even smaller amounts of fluid more often (if certain foods /milk feeds cause vomiting, then avoid these until they feel better). They will still absorb some fluid even if they are vomiting.
- You may have been given medicine to stop vomiting, follow the instructions carefully.
- Observe them carefully and look for the signs of dehydration or when to return to ED as overleaf.

Breast fed babies

As it is difficult to judge how much milk they are taking, we suggest offering the breast more often (every 2 hours) and after each vomit or episode of diarrhoea.

Do not use home-made rehydration solutions as they often do not have the right amount of salt or sugar and can be dangerous.

What are the signs of dehydration?

Your child may feel:

- Thirsty
- Restless
- Unusually tired
- Irritable

You may notice:

- Their mouth is dry
- Their eyes look glassy or slightly sunken
- They cry without tears
- They are making less urine (less than half their normal wet nappies)

What else can I do to help my child get better?

- Skin care - Diarrhoea can cause nappy rash. After each bowel motion wash and dry your child's bottom well and then apply a generous layer of protective cream or ointment (e.g. zinc and castor oil cream or similar).
- Probiotics - sometimes parents ask about probiotics. This is complicated as these are food supplements rather than medications and thus the quality of products may vary and they are expensive. Studies show that certain probiotics **may** shorten the duration of diarrhoea by 1 day. However, this only applies to products containing the specific strains such as **Lactobacillus Rhamnosus GG** or **Saccharomyces Boulardii** and only at doses of **5 to 10 billion CFUs per day** (ask your pharmacist for advice on this).

When to take your child to the GP?

If your child:

- Is having diarrhoea for more than 10 days or is not eating solids for more than 4 days
- There is blood or mucous in the stool.
- If diarrhoea lasts for more than 5 days see your GP to discuss the possibility of a temporary dairy free diet (lactose free) as some viruses have been shown to cause a temporary lactose intolerance.

When to bring your child back to the ED?

If your child:

- Is showing signs of **dehydration**
- Is having frequent **large** loose bowel motions.
- Is vomiting after every drink.
- Has blood in their bowel motions or vomit.
- Has severe stomach pains.
- Is concerning you for any other reason.

Danger Signs – When to call an ambulance?

If your child is:

- Lethargic or sleepy (difficult to wake)
- Floppy or limp
- Pale with cold hands and feet



Dial 111 for an ambulance

Preventing the spread of Gastro

Gastro' spreads very easily to others. To prevent the spread of the disease:

- Wash and dry hands thoroughly - especially after using the toilet, after nappy changing and before food preparation.
- Clean the toilet and bathroom areas with bathroom cleaner often and carefully.
- Do not share food and drinks.
- Keep your child away from friends and other children until vomiting and diarrhoea have stopped.
- Children with diarrhoea must stay away from Day Care, Kohanga Reo and school until 2 days after the diarrhoea has stopped.

Where to get advice or information?

- Your family doctor
- After hours medical service
- <http://www.kidshealth.org.nz/>
- Healthline: 0800 611 116
- North Shore Hospital ECC: 486 1491,
- Waitakere Hospital ED: 839 0000

