

Gastroenteritis: When Your Child Needs Hospital Care

Gastroenteritis is a common childhood illness that causes diarrhea and vomiting that can lead to dehydration. It is usually caused by a virus but can also be caused by bacteria or a parasite. Most of the time mild diarrhea and vomiting last for just a few days. However, if symptoms don't go away or they get worse, your child may need to be treated in the hospital.

Symptoms to watch for

Call your child's doctor if your child is younger than 6 months and has any of the following:

- Blood in the stool
- Frequent vomiting
- Stomach pain
- Urinates less often (Wets fewer than 6 diapers per day.)
- No tears when crying
- Loss of appetite for liquids
- High fever (over 102°F or 39°C)
- Frequent diarrhea
- Dry, sticky mouth
- Weight loss
- Extreme thirst

Care of your child at the hospital

The biggest concern with gastroenteritis is dehydration, which occurs when a child loses too much fluid and becomes dried out. If your child has lost a lot of fluids from vomiting or diarrhea, he may need an IV to get fluids back into his body. An IV is a small plastic tube that is placed inside a vein under your child's skin. Fluids are given through the IV.

When can my child go home?

Once your child gets fluids into her body and starts making normal amounts of urine again, she will be able to go home. This can take only a few hours, or your child may need to stay overnight in the hospital.

Care of your child at home

For cases of mild to moderate diarrhea, continue to give your child a normal diet including formula or milk. Breastfeeding can continue. If your child is not able to tolerate cow's milk because of the diarrhea, talk with your child's doctor about temporarily removing it from his diet.

Special fluids called *electrolyte solutions* have been designed to replace water and salts lost during diarrhea. Do not try to prepare these special fluids yourself. Ask your child's doctor or a pharmacist for a recommendation.

Continue to feed your child if he is not vomiting. You may have to give your child smaller amounts of food than normal or give your child foods that do not further upset his stomach.

Keep your child healthy

The following are ways to keep your child healthy:

- **Stop germs from spreading.** Frequent hand washing with soap or using a hand sanitizer is the best way to prevent these germs from spreading.
- **Avoid germs.** Try to keep your child away from children who have diarrhea or are vomiting.

The information contained in this publication should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.

From your doctor

American Academy
of Pediatrics



DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN™

The American Academy of Pediatrics is an organization of 60,000 primary care pediatricians, pediatric medical subspecialists, and pediatric surgical specialists dedicated to the health, safety, and well-being of infants, children, adolescents, and young adults.

American Academy of Pediatrics
Web site—www.aap.org

Copyright © 2008
American Academy of Pediatrics