



Gastroenteritis advice

We think that your child is now well enough to go home.

The aim of this leaflet is help you care for your child at home if he/she has gastroenteritis. It explains what the condition is, how it will affect your child and how the infection is treated. If you have any questions or concerns that aren't answered in the leaflet, please speak to one of the nursing staff.

What is gastroenteritis?

Gastroenteritis is an infection of the bowel. It is caused by a bacteria or virus (bug), which is usually spread by the hand to mouth route, but it can also be caused by infected food. Vomiting usually lasts for 1-3 days and diarrhoea for up to 2 weeks. The illness may also involve crampy tummy pains and your child may have a fever.

Is gastroenteritis dangerous?

For most children, gastroenteritis is not serious and they can be safely cared for at home but a child can become dehydrated very quickly, which can be serious. Dehydration (low body fluid) happens when your child loses too much fluid from their body through diarrhoea and vomiting. (See below for when to seek medical advice.)

What is the treatment for gastroenteritis?

Treatment involves controlling any fever and ensuring your child drinks adequately. Symptoms often settle after a few days or so as the body's own immune system usually clears the infection. **You should not give medicines to stop diarrhoea to children under 12 years old.** They are unsafe to give to children due to possible serious complications. It is only rarely that bowel infections require prescribed medicines. If symptoms are severe or persistent, your doctor may decide to send a sample of your child's faeces (poo) for testing.

Things you can do at home to avoid dehydration and to relieve symptoms

- Encourage your child to drink. The best type of fluid is water or oral rehydration solution such as *Dioralyte*, available from all Chemists without a prescription. Give small amounts frequently e.g. 5-10ml every 10 minutes, initially, then increase it when there is no more vomiting until your child is tolerating full cups or bottles of the fluid.
- Babies should continue to be breast fed or bottle fed with their normal full strength feeds, if they will take it. This is in addition to extra rehydration drinks (described below).
- Older children - offer them some food every now and then. However, if he or she does not want to eat, that is fine. Drinks are the most important and food can wait until the appetite returns.

- Do not “starve” a child with diarrhoea. This used to be advised but is now known to be wrong. Start with small amounts of plain food.

Weight of child **mls per hour**

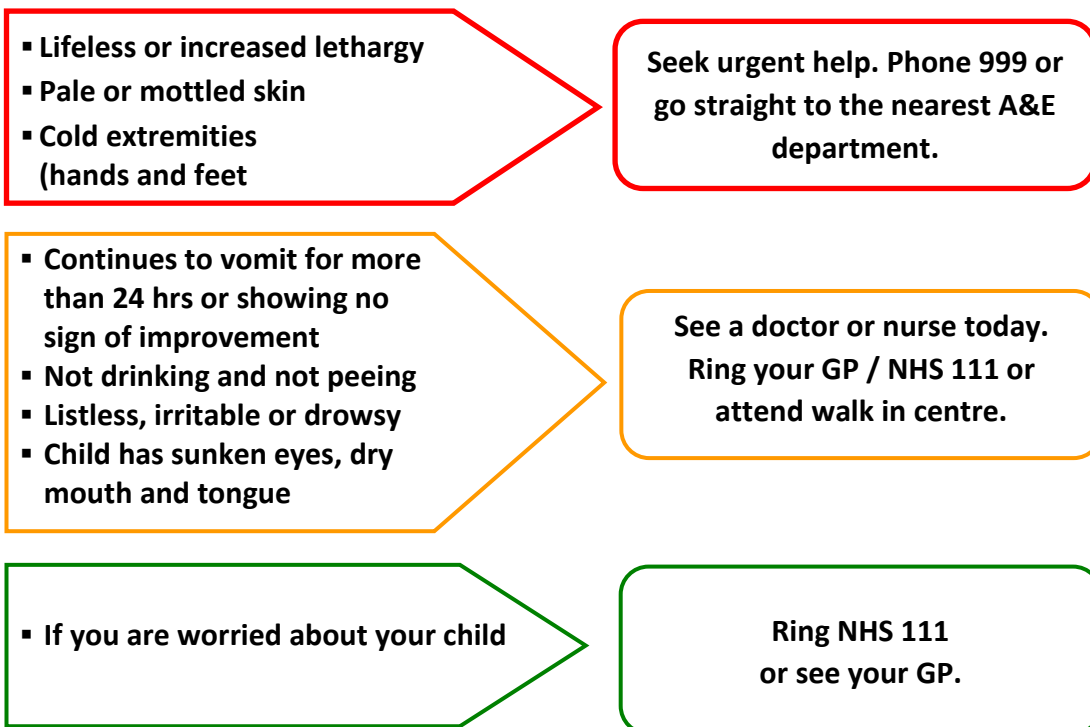
- If your child vomits, wait 5-10 minutes and then start giving drinks again, but more slowly (for example, a spoonful every 2-3 minutes). However, the total amount should still be as above.
- Rehydration drinks such as *Dioralyte* provide a perfect balance of water, salts, and sugar. They do not stop or reduce diarrhoea but are the best drinks to prevent or treat dehydration.
- Do not use home-made salt/sugar drinks, as the quantity of salt and sugar has to be exact. If rehydration drinks are not available, then give water as the main drink. It is best not to give drinks that contain a lot of sugar (fruit juices, cola, or other fizzy drinks) until diarrhoea has stopped as they can sometimes make diarrhoea worse.

Can gastroenteritis be prevented?

Good hygiene helps prevent gastroenteritis. Always wash your hands with soap in warm, running water after changing nappies, after going to the toilet and before touching food. Teach your child to wash their hands as above and after playing with pets or playing in the garden. If your child or anyone in the household has got gastroenteritis, you should also ensure that you regularly clean the toilets after use, using disinfectant. Don't share towels or facecloths and keep infected people away from food preparation areas.

Children should not attend any school or other childcare facility until at least 48 hours after the last episode of diarrhoea or vomiting. Children should not swim in swimming pools for 2 weeks after the last episode of diarrhoea.

What to do if you are concerned about your child



Contacting us

Paediatric Emergency Department: 0118 322 6875 / 6876

Kempton Day Bed Unit: 0118 322 7512 / 8754 (Mon-Fri 7am-7pm)

Dolphin & Lion Ward: 0118 322 7519 / 8075 (outside of these hours)

Further information

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/diarrhoea-and-vomiting/>

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

RBFT Paediatric Unit, February 2025.

Next review due: February 2027.