Caring for others

- When caring for others with viral gastro, **clean up vomit or diarrhoea quickly,** wash and dry your hands thoroughly after cleaning up.
- Use separate towels and face cloths for the unwell person.
- **The unwell person should not share food and drinks** with other people in the home.

Preparing food

- People unwell with gastro should not prepare food for other people while they are sick and for at least 48 hours after they have recovered. They should stay out of the kitchen.
- Food should be cooked or reheated thoroughly, viruses die when food is very hot.
- Viruses can be found in shellfish if the sea water contains human sewage. Shellfish should only be collected from places where there are no warning signs.

Cleaning your home

The gastro viruses can survive outside the body and live on surfaces contaminated by vomit and/or poos. Extra cleaning is important when a person in the home is unwell with gastro. Toilet and bathroom areas should be cleaned and disinfected regularly with **bleach-based cleaning agents.**

- Clean any surface that has had vomit or poos on it with hot soapy water then disinfect contaminated surfaces with bleach solution (1g/L of hypochlorite. The g/L is written on the bottle of bleach) that is made up fresh each day. **Wash any clothing or bedding that has vomit or diarrhoea on them,** in hot water and detergent.

Main prevention tips

- **Wash your hands thoroughly** with plenty of soap, cleaning under fingernails, rinsing hands well and drying with a clean towel:
  - When caring for people with gastro.
  - After using the toilet or changing a baby's nappy.
  - Before and after preparing food.

- People with gastro should not go to work, school and early childhood centres until they have been well (symptom free) for **48 hours.**
- People with gastro **should not prepare food** for others for at least 48 hours after their vomiting and diarrhoea stops.
- Normal household cleaners will not kill viruses, you must also use a **bleach-based disinfectant** after cleaning.

Regional Public Health
Better Health For The Greater Wellington Region

Acknowledgements to Northland Health for the use of content from their pamphlet.

Reviewed August 2015.

VIRAL Gastroenteritis

Viral gastroenteritis (gastro) is a stomach illness sometimes called a tummy bug, is often caused by viruses. The two most common viruses are rotavirus and norovirus.

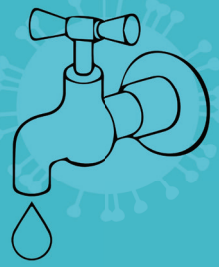
The virus causes vomiting (sickness) and diarrhoea (runny, watery poos). A person may also experience a fever or tummy pains.

How people can get **the virus**

Viral gastro is extremely infectious and people can pass the virus on even before symptoms start.

The virus is found in high numbers in the vomit and faeces (poos) of people with the infection. People become infected when they **swallow** or **inhale** the virus. This can happen in several ways:

- Direct contact e.g. cleaning up the vomit or diarrhoea of a sick person.
- From food which has been handled by a sick person.
- From drinking contaminated water e.g. from septic tank run off or untreated water supply.



- Touching surfaces contaminated with viruses e.g. taps, towels, utensils.
- The virus can be very easily spread at home and within institutions e.g. hospitals, rest homes, schools and early childhood centres. If you have good hand hygiene, use bleach-based cleaning agents and ill people keep away from others, there is very little, if any spread.

Symptoms

- Symptoms usually appear 10-50 hours after contact with the virus.

- The most common symptoms are **nausea (feeling sick), stomach cramps, diarrhoea (runny, watery poos)** and **vomiting.** Headaches, chills and aching muscles may also occur.
- Vomiting is more common in children.
- Dehydration can be a serious problem in young babies, the elderly and people with weakened immune systems.
- Norovirus infection usually causes illness for 24 – 72 hours.
- Rotavirus causes illness for 4 – 6 days. Rotavirus infections may occur in waves where you start to get better and then get worse again.

Treatment

Viral gastro cannot be treated with antibiotics.

Drink plenty of fluids while diarrhoea and vomiting lasts to prevent dehydration – this is most important for babies and young children (see information in preventing/treating dehydration in the Well Child Tamariki Ora Health Book by the Ministry of Health).

Contact Healthline on 0800 611 116 or see a doctor if vomiting and/or diarrhoea is severe or if you are not getting better .

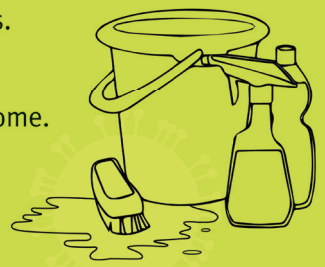
Taking time off **school** or **work**

People with gastro should not go to work, school and early childhood centres until they have been well (symptom free) for **48 hours.**

There will be viruses in your poos for several weeks after you become well. You should continue to wash and dry your hands thoroughly after you have been to the toilet.

How to **stop the spread** of viral gastroenteritis

Viral gastro is extremely infectious and people can pass the virus on even before symptoms start. Some people do not have symptoms, but can carry and pass the virus onto other people.

If you are suffereing from or caring for others with viral gastro, you need to pay special attention to personal hygiene especially when:

- Caring for others.
- Preparing food.
- Cleaning your home.