

Rotavirus

Description

Rotavirus is the most common cause of viral gastroenteritis in young children and easily causes outbreaks in groups or settings such as early childhood centres.

Rotavirus causes watery diarrhoea, nausea and vomiting, sometimes with stomach pain, and fever. These symptoms usually last about four to six days. Sometimes rotavirus will cause symptoms for one or two days and then seem to get better, only to come back after one or two more days. This makes the 48 hours exclusion period after symptoms really important to prevent outbreaks.

Human rotavirus is not carried by animals.

How does it spread?

Rotavirus is spread by hands that come into contact with poos during nappy changing or helping a child use the toilet. From the hands it can spread to surfaces, toys, or food.

Infectious period

A person with rotavirus is infectious while they are unwell and sometimes for several days afterwards.

When a person is infected with rotavirus the symptoms will start after one to three days.

Exclusion period

A child or teacher with rotavirus needs to stay home until they have been free of vomiting and diarrhoea for **at least 48 hours**.

Responsibilities of staff

- Tell parents that a child at the centre has rotavirus.
- Display information about rotavirus on your notice board.
- Make sure all teachers, children and babies wash and dry their hands thoroughly after nappy change, toileting and before eating or handling food and infant formula bottles. Uncooked foods such as fruit, crackers etc can easily become contaminated by unwashed hands.
- Make sure that children wash their hands after nappy change if they are able to, and help children who can not wash their hands properly.
- Wash all toys and surfaces with hot soapy water, and then disinfect with 1:10 dilute bleach (1 teaspoon bleach to 500 ml water).
- Wash smaller toys in the dishwasher.
- Remove play-dough, art and water-play until there are no more cases of rotavirus.
- If you are cleaning up vomit or poos use 1:10 bleach, wear a mask, apron and gloves. Be aware of what you touch when wearing gloves to avoid contaminating the surrounding area.
- Steam clean carpets if vomit or poos has contaminated them. The steam cleaning will kill the virus.



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When should a centre be more concerned?

The following bullet points suggest your centre has an outbreak:

- 15% or higher absenteeism of your total roll (including staff) or most of the ill children are in one area of the centre (eg under two area). Click [here](#) to download a copy of the illness register.
- The children and/or staff all got sick at the same time or after a particular event (eg a party, event held at the centre, petting zoo visit).
- The number of ill children and/or staff doubles in a short timeframe.
- Children and/or staff have bloody diarrhoea.
- A child has been in hospital due to vomiting or diarrhoea.

If any of the above are happening in your centre please contact a health protection officer by email healthprotection@huttvalleydhb.org.nz or phone 04 570 9002.

If you have multiple cases please ask all parents to wash their hands when arriving at the centre. If this is not practicable have adults use antiseptic alcohol-based hand sanitiser before entering or leaving the centre. Children and teachers should wash and dry their hands with soap and water on arriving and leaving the centre. Hand sanitisers are an addition to handwashing and should not be used as an instead of hand washing.

Responsibilities of parents

- Keep your child at home until they have been free of vomiting and diarrhoea for at least 48 hours.
- Make sure all family members are washing and drying their hands properly. Use liquid soap and dry them thoroughly.
- The child sick with rotavirus should not share towels with the rest of the family.

Treatment

There is no treatment for rotavirus but it is important to make sure your child has enough fluid.

If the child is vomiting or has diarrhoea they will lose a lot of nutrients and fluids. It is important to give them frequent, small drinks (consider using a syringe to give fluids).

The best option is to dilute some fruit juice or cordial in water (1 part juice to 5 parts water).

Immunisation

Immunisation against rotavirus is available from your family doctor. From 1 July 2014, babies who are under 15 weeks of age will be eligible for funded rotavirus immunisation. This vaccine will be added to the national immunisation schedule and routinely offered at 6 weeks, 3 and 5 months.

