

To: Parents and caregivers of children

Re: Gastroenteritis

There have been a number of children and some parents at the centre experiencing vomiting and diarrhoea. Regional Public Health is currently working with the centre.

What is it?

Gastroenteritis (tummy bug, gastro) is an infection which causes diarrhoea (runny, watery bowel motions or poo) and vomiting (sickness). Children may feel sick (nausea), sometimes they have a fever or tummy pains.

Gastroenteritis is often caused by viruses, but can also be caused by bacteria or other organisms. At this stage we do not know which organism is causing illness at the centre.

How do people get it?

A child can catch the virus when they touch something which has been in contact with the diarrhoea or vomit of a person with the infection, and they put their hand in their mouth. The virus is easily spread in day care, kindergartens and schools.

Because of this, the most important precaution against gastroenteritis is careful hand washing after toilet use, nappy changing, and before handling or eating food or preparing infant formula.

What can I do if my child is unwell?

Most children can be cared for at home. The main treatment is to keep giving your child small amounts of fluids often to prevent dehydration. Most children do not need medicine; the body will clear out the virus on its own. If you have concerns contact your GP or Healthline on 0800 611 116.

Parents should watch out for dehydration. Dehydration is the loss of fluid, due to the vomiting and diarrhoea. Watch for:

- Dry mouth and tongue.
- Sunken eyes.
- Cold hands and feet.
- Unusual sleepiness or lack of energy.
- Fewer wet nappies or not passing as much urine as usual.

If your child has any of these signs, you need to take them to see a doctor urgently.

Please let the centre know if your child is unwell

Please ring to report your child's absence in the usual way, and let staff know if they have diarrhoea or vomiting. Even if your child is not due to attend the centre, please ring and tell the centre of their illness. Regional Public Health may contact you to ask for more information and discuss if a faecal (poo) sample is needed.

How can I help prevent the spread of gastroenteritis?

Gastro spreads very easily to others. If your child has been unwell, you can help prevent spreading the disease by:

- **Thorough handwashing** – especially after using the toilet, after nappy changing and before handling food; encourage your child to wash and dry their hands after using the toilet.
- **Thorough cleaning** of toilet and bathroom areas.
- **Washing dirty clothing**, in hot water preferably, and rinsing separately from the rest of the family laundry.
- **Avoiding sharing food and drinks.**
- **Keeping your child away from friends and other children** until vomiting and diarrhoea have stopped; children with diarrhoea must stay away from day care, kindergarten and school.

If your child develops diarrhoea or vomiting we recommend that you:

- See your doctor to discuss the illness.
- Ask your doctor to have a faecal specimen tested. This should take place as close as possible to the start of the illness. It is helpful if the doctor includes tests for bacteria, protozoa and viral gastroenteritis. We are happy to discuss any concerns you may have.
- If tests confirm which organism is causing this illness we may be able to provide further advice.
- Inform the Centre of the illness.
- **Keep your child away from the Centre until at least 48 hours after diarrhoea and vomiting have stopped completely.**

If you would like further information please phone a member of the Early Childhood Team at Regional Public Health on ph 570 9002.