



**NATIONWIDE CHILDREN'S**  
*When your child needs a hospital, everything matters.™*

**Helping Hand™**

*Health Education for Patients and Families*

# Rotavirus

Rotavirus (ROE tuh vie russ) is a contagious illness caused by a virus that affects the intestine. The virus spreads very easily from person to person by the “fecal-oral” route. Someone touches an infected person’s stool (poop), does not wash their hands thoroughly and leaves the virus on anything touched such as toys, food and water. The virus enters the body when a person’s fingers touch the contaminated thing and then his or her mouth.

Rotavirus often occurs in the winter and spring. It is more common in infants and children up to about 2 years of age, but older children and adults can get it too. Most infants have been immunized (vaccinated) against rotavirus and are likely to have only mild symptoms. A person can get a mild case again if re-exposed.

Rotavirus usually does not cause serious illness. The greatest risk is to infants. Severe vomiting and diarrhea can lead to dehydration (losing too much body fluid). The infant may need to be hospitalized to replace the lost body fluids.

## Diagnosis and symptoms

The diagnosis of rotavirus is usually made based on symptoms. Stool specimens are rarely done. Symptoms start 1 to 2 days after the child is infected and can last for 3 to 8 days.

They include:

- fever
- nausea, vomiting and loss of appetite
- watery stools or diarrhea
- mild stomach pain or cramping

## Signs of dehydration

Dehydration is the most serious risk to children and can be dangerous. Call your child’s doctor if you see any of these signs (Picture 1, next page):

- The inside of your child’s mouth looks dry and sticky. Sometimes, lips may be dry or cracked on the outside, especially in the winter.

- No urine (wet diapers) for 6 hours or more
- Sleepier than usual and hard to wake up
- Fewer or no tears when crying
- Breathing is hard or fast.
- Eyes look "sunken."
- The "soft spot" on the top of an infant's head is flat, sunken, or "pulls in."

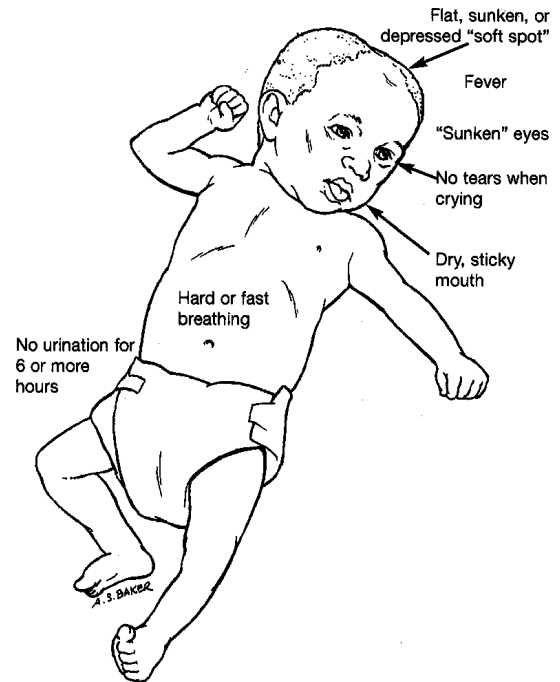
## Treatment

Rotavirus symptoms usually go away without treatment. Since it is caused by a virus, antibiotics will not help and may cause more diarrhea.

- Make sure your child gets plenty of rest.
- Give regular foods. If your child is vomiting, wait a few hours and try again.
- Give extra fluids in little sips throughout the day (Picture 2). Older children can suck on ice chips. Do not give fruit juice or liquids that are high in sugar, such as Hi-C®, Hawaiian Punch®, Kool-Aid® or syrups. Too much juice can cause diarrhea.
- Avoid any red-colored food or drinks that might look like blood in diarrhea or vomit.
- Do not give over-the-counter medicines to stop the diarrhea or vomiting.
- Check your child's temperature using a digital thermometer. **Never use a mercury thermometer.** Wash the thermometer thoroughly after each use.
  - Use only a rectal thermometer in infants under 3 months of age.
  - For infants 4 months of age or older, take rectal, oral, ear or axillary (armpit) temperatures.
  - Do not take oral temperatures until your child is over 4 years of age.

## For dehydration:

- Continue to give breast milk or formula to infants and milk to toddlers and older children. Do not give only water.



**Picture 1** Signs of dehydration.



**Picture 2** It is very important to give your child plenty of liquids.

- You may need to give your child a drink with electrolytes (minerals needed by the body), alike Pedialyte<sup>®</sup>, Naturalyte<sup>®</sup>, Infalyte<sup>®</sup> or K-Electrolyte<sup>®</sup> powdered mix. The amount depends on the weight of your child. Ask the nurse or doctor to tell you how much to give.
- Do not give sports drinks. They do not have the right mix of electrolytes.

## Prevention

The best ways to prevent rotavirus from spreading to others are:

- Make sure your child gets the vaccines on time, the first one starting at 2 months of age. All doses should be given by 8 months.
- Wash your hands before and after every diaper change, after helping your child in the bathroom, before touching food and before eating (Picture 3).
- If your child is old enough to crawl or walk, wash his or her hands often.
- Teach older children to avoid touching their mouths.
- Wipe down with disinfectant, bleach solution or soap and water:
  - any toys that your child usually puts in his mouth
  - hard surfaces that your child touches.
- Wash soiled clothes right away, in hot soapy water.
- Do not send your child to school or childcare until the diarrhea has stopped.



**Picture 3** Good hand washing is a MUST!

## When to call the doctor

Call your child's doctor if any of the following occurs:

- Age 3 months or younger - temperature of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher.
- Child will not eat or drink liquids and looks dehydrated (Picture 1, page 1).
- Bloody diarrhea
- Severe stomach pain