

Viral Gastroenteritis

What teachers need to know

What is viral gastroenteritis?

Viral gastroenteritis is an infection that destroys cells lining the small intestine. This infection may cause vomiting, diarrhea, and possible dehydration. There are several viruses, including rotaviruses and norovirus, that cause this illness, many of which are highly contagious.

Symptoms of viral gastroenteritis

Symptoms of these viruses include watery diarrhea, vomiting, fever, headache, abdominal cramps, and muscle aches. These symptoms usually clear in 1-2 days but may last for up to 2 weeks. Children are at higher risk for dehydration, particularly if they have severe diarrhea accompanied by vomiting, and should be monitored closely.

Symptoms of dehydration include slight dry mouth, increased thirst, less urine production, fewer tears, and sunken eyes. Children may become irritable or their heart rate may increase in severe situations. If you suspect a student is dehydrated, contact the school nurse.

How viral gastroenteritis is spread

Viral gastroenteritis is highly contagious. These viruses, particularly norovirus, are found in the feces and vomit of infected persons. Persons may become infected after touching contaminated surfaces and then placing their hands in their mouths, eating or drinking contaminated foods and beverages, or by sharing eating utensils. Teachers may become infected while cleaning contaminated surfaces or caring for children, particularly those in diapers.

Prevention of viral gastroenteritis

Have your students wash their hands frequently with soap and water, especially before eating and after using the restroom. Teachers and staff should wash their hands before preparing food, eating, after diaper changes, and after cleaning contaminated surfaces. All staff should not prepare food for other persons. Laundry that has been soiled should be removed and washed immediately. Contaminated surfaces should be cleaned with a product containing bleach.

Treatment

There is no specific treatment for viral gastroenteritis. If you become ill, stay home to rest, continue eating, and drink plenty of fluids. Staff should not return to school until they have been symptom-free for one day.

Prevention Tips

Practice and Encourage Proper Hand Hygiene

Hand hygiene is essential for preventing the spread of infection. Soap and water should be used if hands are visibly soiled, after using the restroom, changing a diaper, or handling soiled items.

Stay at home if you are sick.

All persons should stay home from school until they have been symptom-free for 1 day.

Clean soiled areas carefully

Items that have come into contact with a sick child, vomit, or feces, should be carefully cleaned using a product containing bleach. Hands should be cleaned after disinfecting any items. Gloves should be worn when cleaning up vomit or feces of an infected child.

