

GASTROENTERITIS

What is Gastroenteritis?

Gastroenteritis means inflammation of the stomach, small intestines and large intestines. It is often referred to as the “stomach flu,” but influenza viruses are not responsible.

How do People get Gastroenteritis?

Many different viruses, bacteria and parasites can be responsible, including Rotaviruses, Noroviruses, Salmonella, E.Coli, and Giardia.

Methods of transmission depend on the cause but frequently include:

- Handling or consuming contaminated food or water.
- Touching a contaminated surface and then placing your hands or fingers in or near your mouth.
- Having close or direct contact with another person infected or showing symptoms.

Some cases of Gastroenteritis are extremely contagious and can spread rapidly—especially in day-care centers, nursing homes and other residential facilities. Precautions should be taken anytime someone is showing symptoms, and an individual can remain contagious 3 days or more after symptoms end.

Symptoms of Gastroenteritis

Symptoms can begin a few hours to 3 days after exposure and commonly include nausea, stomach cramps, vomiting and diarrhea (which can be severe, bloody or watery). In some cases, individuals may also develop a low-grade fever, chills or a headache.

Diagnosis and Treatment of Gastroenteritis

In order to determine the cause of Gastroenteritis, your provider will need a stool sample. Often, determining the cause of the infection can help to stop or prevent an outbreak of the illness, so it is important to talk to your provider about getting tested if you experience any symptoms.

Treatment of Gastroenteritis is focused mainly on keeping the individual hydrated. Excessive vomiting and diarrhea can lead to dehydration, especially in the young, the old and those with compromised immune systems. Lost fluids should be replaced with small, frequent offerings of clear fluids. If an individual exhibits signs of dehydration—dry mouth, little or no urination, crying with no tears or sleepiness or unresponsiveness—see a medical provider immediately.

Antibiotics may treat certain bacterial infections, but should NOT be used as a treatment for Gastroenteritis unless the source of infection has been laboratory identified and a doctor has been consulted. In some cases, medication may be prescribed to help stop or reduce vomiting.

How Can I Prevent Gastroenteritis?

Frequent, proper hand washing, using hand sanitizer and disinfecting surfaces regularly are good ways to prevent some of the viruses and bacteria that cause Gastroenteritis. Other good prevention habits include:

- Practicing safe food handling procedures.
- Not consuming under or uncooked food.
- Ensuring the water you drink, especially while outdoors, has been properly sterilized.
- Asking pool operators about their health and safety procedures.



For more information on gastroenteritis, please contact a public health nurse at City-County Health Department at 454-6950 or visit www.cchdmt.org.