

Viral Gastrointestinal Illness (Stomach Flu)

How to prevent the spread of infection in hospital and at home

What is viral gastrointestinal illness?

Viral gastrointestinal illness, also known as stomach flu, is a common illness. It can occur as a case in just one person or can quickly spread through families and cause outbreaks. Outbreaks occur in the community every year. There are several different viruses that cause illness with vomiting and diarrhea.

How do I know if I have it?

Watery diarrhea and vomiting are the main signs of stomach flu. Headache, fever, and abdominal (belly) cramps are also common. One or two days after being exposed to the virus, a person may begin to have these signs. The illness may last between 1 and 10 days depending on what is causing the illness.

How is it treated?

The goal of treatment is to prevent dehydration caused by vomiting and diarrhea.

Drink frequent small amounts of clear fluids, for example, water, tea or juice to prevent dehydration, unless your health care provider tells you differently.

How did I get it?

You can get the virus if you share food, water, or eating utensils such as forks and knives with someone who has the virus. You can get the virus if you do not wash your hands before eating or drinking.

You can get the virus if you touch contaminated surfaces such as a toilet flusher, water tap or light switch, or contaminated objects. You can get the virus if you have direct physical contact with an infected person.

While in the hospital

What you can do to prevent stomach flu from spreading

Here is what you can do to prevent stomach flu from spreading to others if you are in the hospital.

- Clean your hands often with soap and water, especially before and after using the toilet, and before and after eating or drinking.



- Stay in your hospital room as much as possible.
- **Do not** use common areas, such as the patient kitchen, gift shop, or cafeteria. You can go to other areas of the hospital for treatments and tests.

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Contact Precautions Plus

If you have the stomach flu, health care providers and visitors follow the rules called '**Contact Precautions Plus**' to prevent the virus causing the stomach flu from spreading to other patients in the hospital.

Contact Precautions Plus means:

- We post a sign on the door of your room.
- We put on gloves and wear a gown over our clothing while taking care of you.
- We ask you to use your own washroom or commode (toilet on wheels). **Do not** share your washroom or commode with other patients or your visitors.
- We ask your visitors to clean their hands before entering and after leaving your room. They may also be asked to wear a gown and gloves if they help you to wash or use the toilet.
- We use special cleaning products, such as bleach. Some cleaners have a strong smell.
- Health care providers and visitors remove their gown and gloves and clean their hands when leaving your room.

At home

How to prevent the stomach flu from spreading to others

Follow these instructions to stop spreading viruses that can cause stomach flu.

- Clean your hands often, especially after going to the bathroom and before preparing and eating food.
- People who live with you should wash their hands often.
- **Do not** share personal care items such as towels, toothbrushes or bar soap.
- **Do not** share food or water with someone with signs of nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea.
- Clean bathrooms and other frequently touched surfaces for example, light switches and water taps once per day and more often if visibly soiled.
- Wash cleaning clothes after each use.
- Wash clothing and linens using the normal machine wash cycle.

See your doctor right away or go to the nearest Emergency Department if:

- You develop more diarrhea or vomiting that is not improving.
- You are dehydrated.
- You feel dizzy, lightheaded, or extremely tired (lethargic).

To learn more, it's good to ask:

- Your family doctor
- Your pharmacist
- HealthLinkBC - call 8-1-1 (7-1-1 for deaf and hard of hearing) or go online at www.HealthLinkBC.ca.