

Viral Gastroenteritis

Diarrhea and Vomiting

Viral Gastroenteritis

What is viral gastroenteritis?

- Viral gastroenteritis is inflammation (swelling) of the stomach and bowels (gut) that can cause diarrhea (loose, watery poop) and vomiting (throwing up).
- It is sometimes caused by a very contagious virus called norovirus.
- Some people may also call it the “stomach flu”.

How did I get viral gastroenteritis?

- Viral gastroenteritis is often caused by a germ found in vomit (throw-up) and stool (poop).
- It spreads when you touch something with the germ on it (like a doorknob, sink, tap, toilet, or counter), and then touch your eyes, nose, or mouth.
- **Viruses that cause viral gastroenteritis can spread very easily.** This is because this germ can live outside the body.
- Even after you feel better, you can still spread the virus to others for about 3 days. Continue keeping your hands and surfaces clean to stop the spread.

What are the symptoms of viral gastroenteritis?

- You may have:
 - › Nausea (upset stomach)
 - › Abdominal (stomach) pain
 - › Vomiting
 - › Diarrhea
- Sometimes, it may also cause:
 - › Tiredness
 - › Slight fever (temperature above 38 °C or 100.4 °F)
 - › Chills
 - › Headache or body aches

How is viral gastroenteritis treated?

There is no treatment for viral gastroenteritis. Rest and drinking fluids (like water) may help you feel better.

What will happen in the hospital?

- Health care providers will take extra steps to prevent spreading the virus to other patients. These extra steps are called **Contact Precautions**.

- A Contact Precautions sign will be placed outside your room.
- Health care providers may wear a gown, gloves, a mask, and eye protection when they take care of you or touch items in the area around your bed.
- If you are not in a private room, a commode chair (portable toilet) will be placed at your bedside for your use only.
- Staff who clean your room will need to disinfect all surfaces around your bed and your washroom more often.
- Health care providers will clean their hands often.
- **Please clean your hands with soap and water** every time you use the washroom or commode, and before eating, drinking, or taking medication.
- If you have diarrhea and/or vomiting, you may be asked not to visit other areas of the hospital. Your health care provider will talk about this with you.
- You, your essential care partners, and your visitors should not use the kitchen areas or ice machines on the nursing unit. Ask a staff member to help you.

- Nurses may need to look at your stool and collect samples for testing. Please tell your nurse when you use the washroom.
- Contact Precautions may be stopped when you have not had diarrhea and/or vomiting for at least 2 to 3 days.
- If you have a weak immune system, Contact Precautions may be in place for a longer time. Your health care team will talk about this with you.

What should I tell my visitors before they visit?

All visitors must:

- › Clean their hands before and after visiting, and before and after helping with your care. They may be asked to wear a gown and gloves if providing you with care.
- › **Not** use your washroom. There are other washrooms for visitors. Please ask if you need directions.
- › **Not** visit other patients in the hospital after visiting you.
- › Stay home if they are feeling sick.

What will happen when I go home?

- Always clean your hands with soap and water after using the washroom and before eating.
- Clean the kitchen and washrooms regularly for at least 2 to 3 days after your diarrhea and/or vomiting has stopped. Use household disinfectants or a solution of 1 cup household bleach to 9 cups cold tap water (make a new mixture each day).
- Wash clothes separately if it is soiled with stool:
 - › Rinse the stool off into the toilet
 - › Wash clothes in hot water with detergent
 - › Dry in a hot air clothes dryer, if possible

Outpatient visits (clinics)

- If you come to the hospital for an appointment and you have diarrhea and/or vomiting, make sure you tell your health care provider.
- Clean your hands with the alcohol-based hand rub provided at the registration desk.
- Always wash your hands with soap and water after using the washroom.

If you would like more information, please ask a member your health care team.

Notes:

This pamphlet is for educational purposes only. It is not intended to replace the advice or professional judgment of a health care provider. The information may not apply to all situations. If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.

Find all patient education resources here:
www.nshealth.ca/patient-education-resources

Connect with a registered nurse in Nova Scotia any time:
Call 811 or visit: <https://811.novascotia.ca>

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