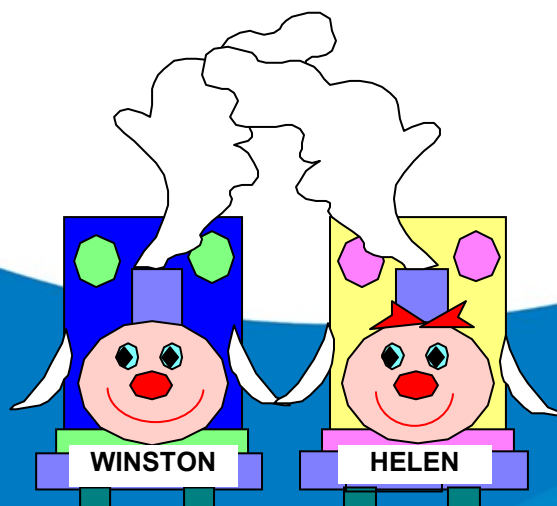


Gastroenteritis

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What is Gastroenteritis?

Gastroenteritis is an infection or irritation of the stomach and intestines, causing vomiting and diarrhoea.

Causes of Gastroenteritis?

- Viruses - are the main cause of gastroenteritis in children. One of the most common is rotavirus. Viral gastroenteritis is highly contagious and is spread from person to person because of poor handwashing after using the toilet.
- Bacteria - causes gastroenteritis when infected food is eaten. This is commonly known as food poisoning. Examples include Campylobacter, found in infected poultry, and Salmonella, found in infected poultry, meat and eggs.
- Parasites - these are rare in the UK. However, in countries whose water may become contaminated they are a common cause of gastroenteritis. Recent holiday destinations should always be taken into consideration.

Signs and symptoms

- Vomiting - usually starts first and on average lasts for 1 or 2 days.
- Diarrhoea - loose or watery bowel movements, which often lasts for several days after vomiting has stopped.
- Dry mouth and lips.
- Eyes appear to be sunken, the fontanelle (the soft spot on top of a baby's head) may also be sunken.
- Children and babies more sleepy than usual.
- Feeling more thirsty.
- Less wet nappies or passing urine less often.
- Temperature - children may develop a temperature in the first few days of the illness.

When to contact a doctor

- Any signs of dehydration (see above).
- Blood visible in the diarrhoea.
- Patient becoming more drowsy/sleepy.
- Pain getting worse.
- The amount of fluids being taken is less than the amount lost through vomiting and diarrhoea.
- Diarrhoea lasting longer than 3 - 4 days.

The main aim of treatment is to prevent dehydration.

Children should be offered small and frequent sips of clear fluid. This should continue even if the child is vomiting, as some of the fluid will still be absorbed. It is important to remember that any fluid is better than none. If a child will only drink their favourite drink, provide small and frequent amounts.

Rehydration drinks such as Dioralyte and Rehydrate are the best solution for children at risk of dehydration. They provide the perfect mix of water, salt and sugar, and as such are a better alternative to water alone. They do not stop or reduce diarrhoea but are the best drink to prevent and treat dehydration. Giving water on its own can be potentially dangerous as it does not contain the vital salts and sugars the child needs.

- Medication which stops diarrhoea should not be used in children because of possible complications.
- Allow children to eat as normally as possible if they wish to. If they do not want to eat, that is ok providing they are taking oral fluids, as they are the most important. Foods high in carbohydrate are a good place to start, such as rice, pasta, bread and potatoes. The idea of starving children with gastroenteritis is now considered to be outdated.
- Breast fed babies should continue to be breastfed and offered additional clear fluids such as Dioralyte. Bottle fed babies should be offered clear fluids, aiming for a similar total volume to that which they normally take but in smaller more frequent feeds. Once the vomiting has subsided milk feeds can be reintroduced. It is not harmful for your baby to be without milk for a short period.

Prevention

Good hand hygiene can help to prevent gastroenteritis.

Children should be encouraged to wash their hands:

- after going to the toilet
- before touching food
- after playing in the garden
- after playing with pets

However, most children will develop gastroenteritis at some point, no matter how careful they are, or how good their hand hygiene is.

If a child had gastroenteritis the following measures may be used to prevent other family members developing symptoms.

- Carers to wash their hands after changing a baby or small child's nappy.
- Regular cleaning of the toilet including the seat and flush handle
- Not using the same towels.

If you have any further questions, please contact your child's consultant via their secretary via the hospital switchboard. The secretaries are available Monday to Friday, 9.00 am to 5.00 pm

If you need to contact the department outside of these hours, please phone either:

Ward 3F 0151 430 1616

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