

# Facts about Rotavirus

## Rotavirus is the most common cause of severe diarrhea in children 6 months to 2 years of age.

Almost all children have had a rotavirus infection by the time they are 5 years of age. Some adults in contact with an infected child can catch the virus but may not have symptoms. Children who have been infected once can get infected again. In Canada, rotavirus infections are more common in the winter months. Outbreaks in child care centres are common. As more children get immunized the rates of rotavirus will go down.

After someone is exposed to the virus it takes 1 to 3 days for signs to appear. The virus can remain in the stools for up to 21 days after the signs began.

Some signs of rotavirus infection are:

- fever (usually the first sign)
- vomiting
- diarrhea for 4 to 8 days
- stomach ache
- dehydration

There is no medicine or direct treatment for a rotavirus infection. It is important to drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration. Some children with dehydration may need to be treated in hospital.

## How is Rotavirus Spread?

**Rotavirus is spread if an infected person does not wash their hands after going to the toilet.** Dirty hands can easily spread rotavirus by touching people, food, drinks, and objects such as sinks, taps, counters, toys, and other things in the environment.

That's why frequent hand washing, cleaning of the environment, and getting infants vaccinated are the keys to prevention.



### ROTAVIRUS is a vaccine-preventable disease

Rotavirus vaccine is provided free to healthy babies at 2 and 4 months of age as part of routine immunization. The vaccine is given by mouth. A few drops of liquid vaccine will be placed into a baby's mouth to swallow. The vaccine prevents about 3 out of 4 cases of rotavirus disease and almost all severe cases, including hospitalizations. Rotavirus vaccine is not recommended for babies older than 8 months of age.



## What to Do at Home

- If another child has rotavirus, watch your child for signs of rotavirus infection.
- Wash your hands and your child's hands after changing a diaper or using the toilet and before preparing or eating food.
- If your child becomes ill with rotavirus, watch for signs of dehydration:



## Signs of Dehydration

- ▶ decreased urination (fewer than 4 wet diapers in 24 hours)
- ▶ increased thirst
- ▶ no tears
- ▶ dry skin, mouth and tongue
- ▶ fast heart beat
- ▶ sunken eyes
- ▶ greyish skin
- ▶ sunken soft spot on baby's head

For more suggestions on "What to Do at Home", please refer to "Facts About Diarrhea page 20 and Facts About Vomiting, page 22



## When to Call Your Doctor or 811

Call your doctor right away if you think your child may be dehydrated.



**Children and staff at the child care centre or school, who are sick with vomiting or diarrhea, should stay at home until 2 days after their symptoms go away.**