

# Mission Bay Doctors Ltd- Gastroenteritis Advice Sheet

## WHAT IS GASTROENTERITIS?

Gastroenteritis (often called 'gastro') is a common infection of the bowel that can cause diarrhoea (runny faeces or poo), vomiting, or both. Gastroenteritis normally settles quickly without treatment. Vomiting may last a day or two. Diarrhoea usually lasts two to three days but can last up to 10 days. Gastroenteritis can cause dehydration (a loss of water).

Babies under six months of age are most at risk. The most common cause of gastro is a virus, which tends to spread very easily. Less common causes of gastro include bacteria or food poisoning. Most causes of gastro are not helped by antibiotics.

## WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF GASTROENTERITIS?

Gastroenteritis often starts with vomiting and then diarrhoea follows. The motions are frequent, loose, and watery. Your child may cry through hunger, thirst, fever or pain. They may want to sleep, be miserable or unsettled and have cramping tummy pain.

## TREATMENT

Gastroenteritis can be mild and treatment is all about fluids.

### MOST CHILDREN RECOVER WITH SIMPLE TREATMENT AT HOME.

- Offer your child small amounts (a few sips at a time) of 'clear fluids' (see below) such as water often (a mouthful (OR 5 – 10 mls every 10-15 minutes). The fluids will not stop the vomiting and diarrhoea but will stop your child becoming dehydrated.

It is important to give fluids, even if the diarrhoea gets worse.

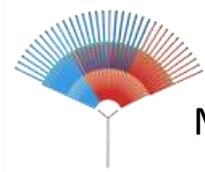
- Make sure your child has plenty of rest.
- Do not give your child medication to stop the vomiting or diarrhoea. These will not work and may be harmful.
- If the child continues to vomit, still continue to offer small sips of fluid. It may seem it is vomited straight back up, but some is retained and helps prevent dehydration.

### WHAT ARE 'CLEAR FLUIDS'?

- The best clear fluids are solutions such as Gastrolyte, Pedialyte, Eelectoral, Enerlyte and Hydralyte, which replace the water, sugar and body salts lost to vomiting and diarrhoea. Hydralyte icy poles are an alternative. You can buy these at the chemist or supermarket. Follow instructions on the packet.

Other options include:

- Watered down unsweetened fruit juice (one cup of juice to four cups of water).
- Watered down flat lemonade (one cup of lemonade to four cups of water).
- Cordial watered down by adding eight cups of water to half a cup of cordial. Avoid giving fizzy drinks, sports drinks or full strength fruit juice as this may worsen the diarrhoea.



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## WHAT IF I AM BREASTFEEDING?

Do not stop breastfeeding. Give your baby smaller feeds more often and offer Gastrolyte or Hydralyte, or cooled, boiled water between feeds if your baby is under nine months of age.

What if my baby is bottle-fed?

- Give your child Gastrolyte or Hydralyte or clear fluids for the first 12–24 hours of symptoms. Use cooled, boiled water to dilute drinks for babies under nine months of age.
- If there is no vomiting or diarrhoea after 12 hours, introduce full-strength formula in smaller, frequent amounts. Half-strength formula is not helpful, and may be harmful.

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## CHILDREN CAN EAT THEIR USUAL FOODS

- If your child is hungry at any time, give them the food they would normally eat or something they feel like eating. Do not force your child to eat if they are vomiting frequently or feeling unwell. They will start to eat when they feel better.
- Your child should be back on normal fluids and diet in 48–72 hours, even if diarrhoea continues. This will make your child better quicker.

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## STOPPING THE SPREAD OF GASTROENTERITIS

- Make sure that you and your family wash hands well with warm soapy water after changing nappies, cleaning up vomit, using the toilet and before eating.
- Wipe things that may be shared between children, such as books and toys.
- Keep your child away from other children while they are unwell. Do not send your child to school, kindergarten, childcare or Kohanga Reo until 24 hours after the last vomiting and diarrhoea.
- Do not let your children share drinks or food or use the same cutlery.
- Thorough cleaning of toilet and bathroom areas
- Dirty soiled clothing should be washed-in hot water preferably and separately from the rest of the family washing

## YOU SHOULD TAKE YOUR CHILD TO THE DOCTOR IF THEY HAVE ANY OF THESE SIGNS

- Your child is unable to keep any fluids down or has a lot of diarrhoea (8-10 watery motions per day)
- There is any blood in the diarrhoea or vomit, or severe stomach pains occur
- Your child shows any signs of dehydration
  - fewer wet nappies
  - weight loss
  - more tired and sleepy than usual
  - sunken eyes
  - cold hands and feet and a dry mouth
- If your child is younger than 6 months, has other health problems and is not getting better or
- If you are worried for any other reason

**SEE YOUR GP, LOCAL ACCIDENT AND MEDICAL CLINIC OR CHILDRENS EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT FOR URGENT REVIEW.**

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This is intended to support, not replace, discussion with your doctor or healthcare professionals. We make every effort to ensure the information is accurate, up to date and easily understood. The Mission Bay Doctors accepts no responsibility for any inaccuracies, information perceived as misleading, or the success of any treatment regimen detailed in the handouts.