

# Gastroenteritis (Stomach Flu)

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Viral gastroenteritis is inflammation of the stomach and intestines caused by a virus. The infection can lead to diarrhea and vomiting. It is sometimes called the "stomach flu." Viral gastroenteritis develops through contact with an infected person or ingestion of contaminated food or water.

Symptoms can appear within 4-48 hours after exposure to contaminated food or water; 1-3 days after contact with infected person:

- Abdominal cramping & pain
- Diarrhea – watery, non-bloody stool
- Nausea, vomiting, or both
- Occasional muscle aches or headache
- Low grade fever

There is often no effective treatment for viral gastroenteritis. Antibiotics are not effective against viruses. Treatment is primarily supportive:

- **Let the stomach settle.** Stop eating and drinking for a few hours, at least two hours after the last vomiting episode.
- **Start with ice chips or taking small sips of water,** clear soda, or clear broths. If retained, it is ok to increase fluids and add salted crackers. Adequate fluid intake is judged by light yellow urine.
- **Ease back into eating.** Gradually begin to eat bland, easy-to-digest foods such as soda crackers, toast, gelatin, bananas, rice and chicken, plain pasta, mashed/baked potatoes. Stop eating if the nausea returns.
- **Avoid certain foods and substances until you feel better.** These include dairy products, caffeine, alcohol, nicotine, and fatty or highly seasoned foods.
- **Get plenty of rest.** The illness and dehydration may have made you weak and tired.
- Use acetaminophen (Tylenol) for headache or fever.

Call your health care provider if diarrhea persists for more than several days or if dehydration occurs.

You should also contact your healthcare practitioner if you have any of these symptoms:

- Blood in the stool
- Confusion, Dizziness, Feeling faint
- No urine for 8 hours or dark tea-colored urine

Source and/or additional resource:

Web MD: <http://www.webmd.com/digestive-disorders/gastroenteritis>

Mayo Clinic: <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/viral-gastroenteritis/DS00085>

Family Doctor.org: [http://kidshealth.org/PageManager.jsp?dn=familydoctor&lic=44&article\\_set=21964](http://kidshealth.org/PageManager.jsp?dn=familydoctor&lic=44&article_set=21964)

If you are a registered Millersville University student and you have questions or you need to make an appointment, please call Millersville University Health Services at 871-5250.