



Rotavirus

What is rotavirus?

Rotavirus is a viral infection that causes gastroenteritis. It is common in children, although adults can also become infected. The virus can cause illness in day care environments, in the elderly living in long-term care homes and in community residences for older adults.

How is it spread?

The primary way this virus is spread is "fecal-oral". This means you can become infected by putting something in your mouth that has been contaminated with the stool of a person with rotavirus. Since the virus can be found on toys and hard surfaces, the virus can be transmitted when these items are handled and unwashed hands are then put into the mouth or when the item itself is directly placed in the mouth.

The virus may also be present in the respiratory secretions (from coughing or sneezing) of an infected person. Transmission may also happen by eating or drinking contaminated food or water.

It is important to note that rotavirus may be present in the stool before the onset of diarrhea until about eight days after. However, in patients who have other major illnesses and are immune compromised, it has been reported in rare cases to be present for as long as 30 days after the onset of symptoms.

What are the symptoms?

You may have diarrhea, fever and vomiting that can last four to six days. The symptoms can become severe and result in dehydration.

How soon do symptoms of rotavirus appear?

You may become sick within one to three days of becoming infected with the virus.

How is rotavirus diagnosed?

Rotavirus is diagnosed when your stool is examined by the public health lab. The results may be available the same day or may take several days, depending on the type of test that is done. You may have to collect several specimens on different days because rotavirus may not be found in every sample.

What is the treatment for rotavirus?

There is no specific treatment for rotavirus. Preventing dehydration with fluid replacement is the main treatment. Consulting your physician or health care provider is recommended when there are signs of dehydration (such as sunken eyes, dry skin, dry mouth and decreased urination).

How do I protect myself and others?

The following are helpful in preventing the spread of rotavirus:

- dispose of diapers in a sanitary manner
- clean surfaces that are touched frequently and clean diaper change areas after each use with a solution that is one part bleach to nine parts water
- exclude infected persons from jobs that require handling food or caring for others and exclude infected children from day care facilities until at least two days after the illness has ended. In the event of a rotavirus outbreak, follow the direction of the Outbreak Management Team for the affected facility or institution
- wash your hands before and after using the toilet, before preparing or eating meals and after changing diapers
- ensure that whatever is put into the mouth is clean and wash your hands before putting your fingers in your mouth

Are there any special concerns about rotavirus?

Routine good handwashing is important because a person with rotavirus can be infectious to others before they even know they are sick and continue to be infectious after their symptoms have resolved. If you think you have rotavirus, consult your health care provider for assessment.

Call the Communicable Disease Team: ext. 8809