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# Diarrhoea and vomiting in schools



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This leaflet contains information about diarrhoea and vomiting  
in schools - what it is and how it affects people

## 1 What causes diarrhoea and vomiting?

Diarrhoea and vomiting can be caused by a number of different organisms, including viruses (such as Rotavirus or Norovirus), bacteria (such as salmonella or campylobacter) and parasites.

## 2 How does diarrhoea and vomiting spread?

Diarrhoea and vomiting can be contracted by eating contaminated food or drinking contaminated water. It can also be easily spread from one person to another (especially if hygiene is poor). All cases of gastro-enteritis should be regarded as potentially infectious.

## 3 What are the symptoms?

The main symptoms are diarrhoea, vomiting, nausea, stomach pains and fever but these may vary. Most people make a full recovery within 1-2 days, however children may become dehydrated and require hospital treatment.

If you have concerns about your health contact NHS Direct on 0845 4647, visit their website <http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk>, or see your family doctor.

## 4 Why does diarrhoea and vomiting cause outbreaks?

Diarrhoea and vomiting causes outbreaks because it can easily spread from one person to another and some organisms are able to survive in the environment for many days.

Some organisms causing gastro-enteritis can infect people without causing symptoms or be excreted for long periods after recovery, however spreading it is unlikely providing that good personal hygiene is practised. Good personal hygiene is essential in limiting spread. Outbreaks are common in environments such as schools, nurseries and homes for elderly people.

## 5 How can these outbreaks be controlled?

Outbreaks can be difficult to control and long-lasting.

- Personal hygiene should be very strict. Thorough hand washing with soap and warm water and hand drying are the most important factors in preventing the spread of gastro-intestinal infections

- Everyone should wash their hands after going to the toilet and before preparing and eating food
- It is important to ensure that children have access to soap, warm water and paper towels in their school toilets
- The person who is ill should not prepare food for others because they can spread the organism to others very easily
- Toilet seats, flush handles, wash basin taps and toilet door handles should be cleaned at least daily, using detergent, hot water and disposable cloths
- Vomit or faeces spillages should be cleaned with detergent and water and then the cleaned area wiped over with a **bleach based** solution
- Disposable gloves and aprons must be worn when cleaning up spillages and disposed of into a plastic bag along with the used gloves and apron. This bag can be tied and disposed of into the normal black rubbish bag

## 6 How is diarrhoea and vomiting treated?

There is no specific treatment for diarrhoea and vomiting apart from letting the illness run its course. It is important to drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration. One or two of the less common organisms may require some specific treatment. If diarrhoea continues or there is blood in the diarrhoea, advice should be sought from a GP.

## 7 Do I need to stay off work or school?

Social contact should be restricted especially with children during the acute stage of the illness. In general people should stay away from work and school until they have been free of symptoms for 48 hours. Only very rarely it is necessary to close a school.

## 8 The Health Protection Agency and diarrhoea and vomiting

More information about the Health Protection Agency and diarrhoea and vomiting is available on our website at <http://www.hpa.org.uk>.