

What is acute gastroenteritis?

Acute gastroenteritis refers to any disease that causes vomiting (one or more episodes of vomiting in a 24-hour period when it is not readily explained by other known pre-disposing medical factors) or diarrhea (three or more loose stools in a 24-hour period).

What are the symptoms?

In addition to vomiting or diarrhea, individuals may experience abdominal (stomach) pain/cramping, bloody stools, and fever.

Individuals can become dehydrated, due to an increase in water loss through diarrhea. Severe dehydration can result in hospitalization, especially in the very young and the very old.

How long does this disease last?

The duration depends on what pathogen (virus, bacteria, or parasite) is causing the symptoms.

How does acute gastroenteritis spread?

- Person-to-person transmission; this often involves an infected child touching an object with contaminated fingers, then another child touching the same object and putting their fingers in their mouth.
- It can also be spread by contaminated food or water, touching or consuming undercooked meat, especially poultry.
- Contact with animals, as when children interact with class pets or on field trips to the petting zoo.

What preventive measures and treatments are available?

Good hand hygiene is the best way to prevent the spread of gastroenteritis. Additional prevention measures include good disinfection practices, proper cooking and storage of food, and exclusion of individuals who are symptomatic.

Treatment involves supportive care, including supporting adequate hydration and a bland diet. Depending on the cause of symptoms (virus, bacteria, or parasite), additional treatments may be necessary.

Encourage families to call a healthcare provider if an individual has diarrhea and any of the following:

- Fever that lasts longer than 24 to 48 hours
- Bloody stools
- Vomiting that lasts more than 12 to 24 hours
- Vomit that looks green, tinged with blood, or like coffee grounds



- Abdomen (stomach) that looks swollen
- Will not eat or drink
- Severe abdominal (stomach) pain
- Rash or jaundice (yellow color of skin and eyes)

What should schools do?

- Notify CDPH in the event of a cluster (4 or more cases or 10% of a classroom, grade, or cohort, within 24 hours). Schools and daycares are required to report all confirmed or suspected outbreaks of gastroenteritis as soon as possible.
- Refer sick people to their healthcare provider for additional support.
- Immediately clean then disinfect the entire area after someone vomits or has diarrhea.
 - Staff cleaning vomit/stool spills should wear masks as aerosolization of the virus can occur.
 - When cleaning vomit, use a product such as an absorbent powder to soak up excess liquid in the vomit first. Once product has solidified the vomit, scoop up the solidified vomit and dispose in the trash.
 - Cleaning and disinfecting with a product approved by the EPA as effective against norovirus or use a bleach solution: [EPA Products Effective Against Norovirus](#)
- Notify exposed family and staff members in the event of a cluster, or in the event of a reportable disease diagnosis. For a list of reportable diseases please refer to IDPH School Nurse Guidance: [IDPH Communicable Disease School Nurse Guidance](#)

What are recommendations for exclusion?

Individuals with acute diarrhea and/or vomiting should be excluded for a minimum of 24 hours after diarrhea and vomiting have stopped, or upon the recommendation of their healthcare provider.

Individuals with bloody diarrhea or diarrhea caused by *Shigella*, *Salmonella*, Shiga toxin-producing *E.coli*, *Cryptosporidium* or *Giardia intestinalis* should be excluded until they receive clearance from their healthcare provider. If directed by CDPH, schools and early childcare centers may need to request stool samples from staff who handle food or assist with toileting.

