



# Central Michigan District Health Department

*Promoting Healthy Families, Healthy Communities*



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## Rotavirus

### What is Rotavirus?

Rotavirus is a virus which causes irritation of the bowels. Almost all children have had a rotavirus infection by the time they are four or five years old, with or without symptoms. In children ages three months to two years, rotavirus is one of the most common causes of gastroenteritis, and it often causes outbreaks of diarrhea in daycare centers and children's hospitals.

### What are the symptoms of Rotavirus?

Children with a rotavirus infection have vomiting and watery diarrhea for three to eight days. Additional symptoms include loss of appetite and dehydration. As with all viruses, some rotavirus infections cause few or no symptoms, especially in adults. Adults can get rotavirus, though disease tends to be milder.

### How is it spread?

Rotavirus infection is contagious. Rotavirus particles pass in the stool of infected persons **before and after** they have symptoms of the illness. Your child can catch a rotavirus infection if he/she puts his/her fingers in their mouth after touching something that has been contaminated by the stool of an infected person. Usually this happens when children forget to wash their hands often enough, especially before eating and after using the toilet. In the United States and other countries with a temperate climate, the disease has a winter and spring seasonal pattern, with annual epidemics occurring from January through June. The highest rates of illness occur among infants and children age 5 and under.

### What is the home treatment?

When your child has a rotavirus infection, he/she can become dehydrated if he/she loses too much body water due to vomiting and watery diarrhea. Check for signs of dehydration, including dry lips and tongue, dry skin, sunken eyes, a decrease in the number of wet diapers, or too few trips to the bathroom to urinate. Call your doctor if you see any of these signs.

To keep your child from becoming dehydrated, follow your doctor's guidance about what your child should eat and drink. Your doctor may suggest that you give your child special drinks that replace body fluids quickly. Some doctors suggest switching your child to a liquid diet until diarrhea passes. Other doctors believe that your child will get well faster if they get back to a normal diet as soon as possible. Follow your doctor's guidance and avoid giving your child store-bought medicines for vomiting or diarrhea unless your doctor recommends them.

*Please visit us at our website [www.cmdhd.org](http://www.cmdhd.org)*

**How can I protect my child/myself?**

For people with healthy immune systems, rotavirus disease is self-limited, lasting only a few days. Treatment is nonspecific and consists primarily of oral rehydration therapy to prevent dehydration. There are two rotavirus vaccines approved for use in infants in the United States. The maximum age to receive the vaccine is 8 months.