



GASTROENTERITIS- THE "STOMACH FLU"

Gastroenteritis is defined as swelling of the stomach and intestines. Sometimes people refer to it as the "stomach flu," but it is not the same virus that causes respiratory infections and it is not prevented by the flu vaccine. The primary symptoms are diarrhea and vomiting. Gastroenteritis occurs commonly throughout the world and most often in children. In the United States, children under five years of age typically have gastroenteritis one to three times each year.

Besides being miserable, diarrhea and vomiting can also lead to life-threatening dehydration. Dehydration occurs when the body loses more water than it takes in and important electrolytes (salts) are depleted.

What causes diarrhea and vomiting?

Diarrhea and vomiting are often caused by bacteria and viruses transmitted through contaminated food, beverages or other sources.

What should I do if my child or I have diarrhea?

Replacing fluids and electrolytes lost by the body is the most important first step. While adults often use beverages like Gatorade to replace fluid losses, it is important to use oral solutions made specifically for patients with diarrhea (Pedialyte®, Naturalyte® and Rehydralyte®). In order to avoid vomiting, start slowly with just one teaspoonful (5 mL) of rehydration solution every two to three minutes. If this amount is tolerated, slowly increase the amount of liquid given at a time. Sodas, sports drinks and chicken broth are not recommended as fluid replacement, because they may have too much sodium or sugar and not enough of other

important salts.

It is okay to continue a regular diet if tolerated. Initially, easily digestible foods such as applesauce, bananas and cereals are suggested.

When should I contact my physician?

You should contact a physician if any of the following occur:

- Dehydration
- Dark urine
- Decreased tears
- Dry mouth
- Sunken eyes
- Light headedness
- Irritability in children
- High fever
- Over 100.4° in child less than three months old
- Over 102.2° in others
- Bloody diarrhea
- Vomiting for more than two days

How can I prevent the "stomach flu"?

There is no question that hand washing is the best way to prevent the spread of bacteria and viruses that cause gastroenteritis. Hands should always be washed after using the bathroom or changing diapers and before preparing or eating food. Children should be taught and encouraged to wash hands with soap and warm water for 20-30 seconds, or as long as it takes to sing "The ABCs" or "Row, Row, Row Your Boat."

For more information, ask your pharmacist!

This information provided by the Michigan Pharmacists Association and: