

Rotavirus - What You Need to Know

What is rotavirus?

Rotavirus is a very contagious viral infection of the digestive tract which causes severe watery diarrhea and vomiting. It is spread when a person ingests fecal matter (poop) of an infected individual. Infection occurs when eating or drinking contaminated foods or drinks or touching contaminated surfaces and then putting fingers in the mouth. Poor handwashing contributes to the spread of rotavirus.

Who is most at risk for rotavirus infection?

Though anyone can get it, rotavirus occurs most often in infants and young children. In fact, by age 5, nearly every child in the world is exposed to rotavirus. Rotavirus is commonly spread among household members of infected people. It also commonly spreads in settings like child care centers and hospitals. Rotavirus transmission typically occurs from January through June.

People who get rotavirus are contagious or most likely to spread the virus if they show symptoms of infection and during the first three days of recovering from illness. People who have no symptoms can also infect others with the virus.

What other symptoms are associated with rotavirus?

Rotavirus symptoms typically begin about two days after a person is exposed to the virus. In addition to severe watery diarrhea and vomiting, the illness commonly causes fever and stomach pain. Other symptoms can include loss of appetite and dehydration. Dehydration, or loss of bodily fluids, can be very dangerous for young children. Signs of dehydration include:

- Decreased urination
- Dark yellow or brown urine
- Dry mouth or lips and increased thirst
- Dizziness upon standing
- Few tears when crying
- Fatigue or increased sleepiness
- Irritability or fussiness

How can we prevent rotavirus?

There is no treatment for rotavirus, only management of symptoms. While proper handwashing and frequent cleaning of high use objects and surfaces are important, they are not enough to stop the spread of rotavirus. The best way to prevent it is through vaccination. You can get rotavirus more than once. Neither vaccination nor previous illness provide full protection. Those who are vaccinated may still get infected, but vaccinated children are less likely to get sick.



Flip over to read more about rotavirus vaccines.



Rotavirus vaccines are given orally or swallowed, not injected with a needle. There are two vaccines available. The number of vaccines needed and the timing of the doses depends on which vaccine is used.

Babies should get one of the two rotavirus vaccines as follows:

RotaTeq® or RV5 is given in 3 doses:

- 2 months: 1st dose
- 4 months: 2nd dose
- 6 months: 3rd dose

Rotarix® or RV1 is given in 2 doses:

- 2 months: 1st dose
- 4 months: 2nd dose

Regardless of which rotavirus vaccine a child gets, they should get the first dose before they turn 15 weeks old. They should complete the final dose before turning 8 months old. Rotavirus vaccines can be given safely at the same time as other vaccines like DTaP, Hib, polio, hepatitis B, and the pneumococcal conjugate vaccine.

Are there any side effects from rotavirus vaccines?

Any medicine, including vaccines, can cause side effects or adverse reactions. Most vaccine side effects are mild and go away within a few days. Common vaccine side effects include fever, headache, or body aches. Side effects are normal and can even be a good sign that the immune system is working to build antibodies that will fight off future infections.

With rotavirus vaccination, side effects may also include irritability and mild diarrhea or vomiting. There is also a small chance of intussusception or bowel blockage. This happens naturally in some children regardless of rotavirus vaccination. Intussusception may require hospitalization and/or surgery. The risk of intussusception occurs within a week of the first or second vaccine dose.

Remember, vaccines are continuously studied. They are also closely monitored for safety. Research continues to show that vaccines are safe, and the benefits outweigh the risks. The risk of a severe allergic reaction to a vaccine is rare (about 1 in 1 million). The choice not to vaccinate is ultimately more risky. Not vaccinating may lead to catching a potentially deadly disease, like rotavirus.

Talk with your healthcare provider, pharmacist, or community health center if you have questions about rotavirus vaccination.

**Find free and low-cost vaccine providers near you:
<https://cdphe.colorado.gov/find-free-low-cost-vaccine-provider>**

#KeepCOHealthy

Sources

- <https://www.cdc.gov/rotavirus/about/index.html>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/rotavirus/vaccines/index.html>
- <https://www.paho.org/en/topics/rotavirus>

www.ImmunizeColorado.org | www.ImmunizeforGood.com

