

# Caregiver advice for gastroenteritis in children over six months

Your child has gastroenteritis. This infection is usually caused by a virus but may be caused by bacteria.

## 1. What you can expect and how you can help your child

Your child is likely to be much improved in one or two days but the diarrhoea might drag on for longer than this.

**Keeping your child's fluid up is very important** to treat or prevent any dehydration. As a general rule, you can give your child as much fluid as they want until the diarrhoea stops.

Doctors often advise giving one teaspoon (5 ml) of fluid every minute. This is effective even if the child is vomiting. An alternative is to give a quarter of a cup every 15 minutes.

### *Use these fluids*

Plasma-lyte-O and Pedialyte are specifically designed for fluid replacement. If this is not available other fluids can be used instead. You could use:

- Breast milk
- Milk formula
- Cow's milk (only if the child is over one year old)
- Clear soup
- Lemonade (flat and diluted, one part lemonade with five parts of warm water)

### *Do not use:*

- Coke
- Tea
- Coffee or
- Sports drinks

They are not suitable because they contain too much sugar or stimulants and may aggravate diarrhoea and worsen dehydration.

### *Other things to do*

- Allow your child to eat if they are hungry
- Encourage regular hand washing to prevent the spread of infection
- Keep the bathroom and toilet clean
- Keep your child away from other children
- Consider applying a barrier cream (eg zinc and castor oil cream) to the nappy area to protect the skin.

In viral gastroenteritis, medicines are not usually helpful and may cause harm.

## 2. When you should get urgent advice

You can expect your child to improve so you should get urgent advice from a doctor or nurse if they get worse. Any one of the following may be a sign of the illness getting worse:

- Not improving within 48 hours
- Getting irritable or restless
- Getting more thirsty
- A very high fever
- Persistent pain in the stomach or abdomen
- Blood or mucus in the poos
- Both vomiting and diarrhoea which persists for more than a few hours
- Not passing much urine (dry nappies)

## 3. Danger signs

*The following are danger signs. Dial 111 or contact a doctor immediately if your child has any of the following:*

- Mottled, grey or bluish skin
- Drowsy, floppy or difficult to wake
- Sunken eyes
- Not able to drink
- Appears to you to be very ill

Your child may need a further check up  
Your Doctor or Nurse may want to check your child even if things appear to be going as expected. If you have been advised to have a check up, write the details here:

Check up time and date: