

What is rotavirus?

Rotavirus is a virus that causes severe diarrhea and vomiting. It affects mostly babies and young children. However, older children and adults can also become infected with rotavirus. Diarrhea and vomiting can lead to serious dehydration (loss of body fluid). If dehydration is not treated, it can be deadly. The rotavirus vaccine protects against this illness.

How is rotavirus spread?

Rotavirus spreads easily. The virus is in the stool (feces) of people who are infected with the virus. It is spread by hands, diapers, or objects like toys, changing tables, or doorknobs that have a small amount of the stool on them. The disease commonly spreads in families, hospitals, and child care centers.

Rotavirus is a tough virus. It can live on objects for several days unless it is killed by a disinfectant (cleaner that kills germs). It is very hard to prevent rotavirus with just hand washing and cleaning with a disinfectant.

What are the signs and symptoms of rotavirus?

Rotavirus causes the following:

- Fever
- Watery diarrhea
- Vomiting
- Stomach pain

How long after infection do symptoms appear?

Once a person has been exposed to rotavirus, it takes about 2 days for the symptoms to appear.

What type of health problems are caused by rotavirus?

Children who get infected may have severe watery diarrhea, often with vomiting, fever, and abdominal pain. Vomiting and watery diarrhea can last from 3 to 8 days. Additional symptoms include loss of appetite and dehydration (loss of body fluids), which can be especially harmful for infants and young children. Symptoms of dehydration include:

- Decrease in urination
- Dry mouth and throat
- Feeling dizzy when standing up.

A dehydrated child may also cry with few or no tears and be unusually sleepy or fussy. Adults who get rotavirus disease tend to have milder symptoms.

How is rotavirus diagnosed?

Diagnosis may be made by detection of rotavirus in stool specimens.

How is rotavirus treated?

For people with healthy immune systems, rotavirus disease lasts for only a few days. Treatment is nonspecific and consists primarily of oral rehydration therapy to prevent dehydration.

How can rotavirus be prevented?

Rotavirus vaccines are very effective in preventing rotavirus disease. Routine vaccination of infants with either of the two available vaccines is recommended:

- RotaTeq® (RV5) is given in 3 doses at ages 2 months, 4 months, and 6 months.
- Rotarix® (RV1) is given in 2 doses at ages 2 months and 4 months.

The vaccines differ in how they are made and the number of doses, but both are given orally.

What are the risks of rotavirus vaccination?

Some, but not all, studies suggest that RotaTeq and Rotarix vaccines may possibly cause a small increase in the risk of intussusception (a bowel blockage that occurs when one portion of the bowel slides into the next; it is treated in a hospital and may require surgery).

It is possible that an estimated 1 to 3 U.S. infants out of 100,000 might develop intussusception within 7 days of getting their first dose of rotavirus vaccine. That means 40 to 120 vaccinated U.S. infants might develop intussusception each year.

The benefits of rotavirus vaccines in preventing hospitalizations and deaths from rotavirus illness far outweigh the small possible risk of intussusception. Rotavirus vaccines prevent more than 65,000 hospitalizations from rotavirus illness.

Where can I get more information?

- Your personal healthcare provider
- Utah Department of Health, Bureau of Epidemiology, 801-538-6191
- [Centers for Disease Control & Prevention](#)

