

County Agent's Report – 16 Jan 2010  
Tummy Troubles

There is a horrible, nasty, yucky, seriously gross Gastro-Intestinal virus going around. If you were not aware of this, count yourself among the blessed. If you were aware of it, but have not yet been felled by this monster, count yourself among the supremely blessed. This beast attacks your digestive system in the less dignified, and most embarrassing ways possible. Yes, I am talking about some serious toilet time – sitting and kneeling.

There is, however, some good news: This is not a potentially deadly malady. It has been reported to me, that some sufferers are said to welcome the sweet release of death; but, alas, it is not to be. You will probably be back at school/work in a few days. Better news: There are some things you can do to lessen suffering, and hasten recovery.

In a recent conversation with Pediatrician, Katherine Deshazer, M.D., Dr. Deshazer said, “For both children and adults, the most important thing is to stay hydrated. If you aren't able to keep anything down, reduce the volume - that is take small amounts of fluids and space them out. A good rule of thumb is to start with a table spoon every five minutes and if that works then take that same amount more frequently. If you (or your child) throws up, go back to five minutes and work your way down again. Also, it is important to note that water lacks important electrolytes, so that should not be your only source of fluid. **Pedialyte** tastes terrible, but a thirsty child WILL drink it, especially if you mix it half and half with a mild juice like apple, pear or white grape (all of which also are colorless and won't stain the carpets). **Gatorade** is only a slightly acceptable alternative. It has a lot of sugar, which can worsen diarrhea.

Another important note is that while a viral ‘stomach bug’ doesn't really need a trip to the doctor, there are a few reasons to visit your PCP or the ER. You should make an appointment with a doctor if the vomiting lasts more than a week, or the diarrhea lasts more than two. You should go to the ER if you (or your child) has vomit that has either blood or bile (avocado green color), or if bloody diarrhea develops, particularly if it is associated with severe abdominal pain. Young children are particularly prone to dehydration, and if a child becomes lethargic, begins to have a very dry mouth and particularly if s/he is crying without tears, a trip to the ER is in order. These can all be signs of more serious and life-threatening conditions.”

In the meantime: how contagious is it? Very. Typically, whole families (classrooms, offices, clubs, etc.) are afflicted at roughly the same time. Therefore, the Center for Disease Control advises, “Persons can reduce their chance of getting infected by frequent handwashing, prompt disinfection of contaminated surfaces with household chlorine bleach-based cleaners, and prompt washing of soiled articles of clothing.” For more information on this subject, go to: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/revb/gastro/faq.htm>

Are there any over-the-counter medicines that can help? Not really. The sickness needs to run its course. Consumption of clear liquids (non-carbonated drinks, teas without cream or sugar, and non-citrus juices, and gelatin) can keep the patient hydrated, while dairy products, meat, grains, and most solid foods simply prolong one's agony.

What to do when the worst is, thankfully, over? Ease back into normal eating s-l-o-w-l-y. You won't have much of an appetite for a while, anyway.

Sources for this article include: <http://fcs.tamu.edu>, [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov), Dr. Katherine Deshazer, M.D.

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