

## **Rotavirus has a variety of symptoms**

Rotavirus is one virus that most often infects infants and young children, and in children 3 months to two years, is one of the most common cause of diarrhea. In the U. S. it usually leads to outbreaks of diarrhea during the winter and spring months.

Rotavirus strikes hardest in child-care centers and children's hospitals. And despite the fact that almost all children have had the Rotavirus by the time they are five years old-some parents never even realized their child has had it because other than diarrhea, their child seemed to act and play just fine.

A severe variation of the infection called rotavirus gastroenteritis, however, can be the leading cause of severe, dehydrating diarrhea in young children. Rotavirus infections are responsible for approximately three million cases of diarrhea and 55,000 hospitalizations for diarrhea and dehydration in children under 5 years old each year in the United States.

Children with a rotavirus infection will experience fever, nausea and vomiting, which are often followed by abdominal cramps and frequent, watery diarrhea. Children who are infected may or may not also have a cough and a runny nose. As with all viruses, though, some rotavirus infections cause few or no symptoms, especially in adults.

Sometimes the diarrhea that accompanies a rotavirus infection is so severe that it can quickly lead to dehydration. Signs of dehydration to watch for include: thirst, irritability, restlessness, lethargy, sunken eyes, a dry mouth and tongue, dry skin, and fewer trips to the bathroom than normal to urinate.

The rotavirus infection is very contagious. The virus passes in the stool of the infected persons before and after they ever have symptoms of the illness. Children can become infected if they put their fingers in their mouths after touching something that has been contaminated by the stool of an infected person. This usually happens when children forget to wash their hands often enough, especially before eating and after using the toilet. People who care for children, including health-care and child-care workers can also spread the virus. It always pays to carry some hand sanitizers with you wherever you go. You never know when they might come in handy.

Frequent hand washing is the best tool to limit the spread of rotavirus infection. Children who are infected should stay home from group activities until the diarrhea has resolved. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that the rotavirus vaccine be included in the line-up of routine immunizations given to all infants. The vaccine, which is called RotaTeq, has been found to prevent approximately 75 percent of cases of rotavirus infection and 98 percent of severe cases of dehydration.

Because antibiotics do not work against illnesses caused by viruses, your doctor will not give you antibiotics to treat a rotavirus infection. Parents and grandparents should call the doctor for advice if your child has signs or symptoms of a rotavirus infection, and call immediately if your child is showing signs of dehydration. Summer is almost here.