

# ROTAVIRUS



**WHAT IS ROTAVIRUS?** Rotavirus is a contagious virus that can cause gastroenteritis (inflammation of the stomach and intestines). Severe rotavirus infections affect mostly babies and young children and cause fever, diarrhea (loose bowel movements) and vomiting. Diarrhea and vomiting can cause serious dehydration (loss of body fluids), sometimes leading to the need for hospitalization.

Rotavirus is the most common cause of severe diarrhea, and hospitalization for diarrhea, in children. Before rotavirus vaccination programs started in Canada, most children were infected with rotavirus at least once before they turned five years of age.

People who are the highest risk of getting rotavirus are:

- Children under five years of age
- Infants who were born prematurely
- Children with weakened immune systems



**HOW IS ROTAVIRUS SPREAD?** Rotavirus spreads through contact with the stool (poop) of an infected person. The virus spreads very easily among babies and young children, who can then spread it to family members or caregivers.

It is spread when children put their fingers in their mouths after touching something that has been contaminated with small amounts of stool from an infected person.

Rotavirus can be spread by touching:

- The hands of someone who has the infection
- Something that has been touched by a person with the infection, such as toys, furniture or countertops

## PREVENTION

You can protect against rotavirus with a safe and effective vaccine. The vaccine is given orally (drops in the infant's mouth). In Ontario, children receive a dose of rotavirus vaccine at the following ages:

- Two months
- Four months
- Six months

Rotavirus can be found in the stool for up to two days before and 10 days after symptoms develop. An infected person can still spread the virus, even if they don't have any symptoms. In children with weakened immune systems, the virus can last longer. Children who have been infected once can be infected again, but the illness is usually less severe after the first time.

Rotavirus is a very strong virus. It can live on objects for several days. Even with hand washing and cleaning with a disinfectant (a cleaner that kills germs), it can be very hard to prevent the spread of rotavirus.



**IS IT SERIOUS?** Babies and young children who have severe diarrhea and vomiting can lose so much fluid that they become dehydrated. If parents cannot get their child to drink enough fluid, they may have to go to the hospital to get an intravenous line (a needle that goes into the vein) to replace the fluids and minerals needed to survive.

**SINCE THE VACCINE WAS INTRODUCED, HOSPITALIZATIONS DUE TO ROTAVIRUS INFECTION HAVE DECREASED BY**

**71%**  
IN ONTARIO



## WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

Rotavirus often spreads in places where many children are together, such as daycare centres. Family members and other people the child has close contact with may also get sick.

Rotavirus infections are most severe in babies and young children between three months and two years of age, who have not been vaccinated.



## SYMPTOMS

Once a person has been exposed to rotavirus, it takes about 24 to 72 hours for the symptoms to appear. The first symptoms are usually fever and vomiting, and then watery diarrhea, which can last for five to seven days. Some children may experience vomiting only. Children who have weakened immune systems may have a more serious illness for a longer period of time. Other symptoms include a lack of appetite and dehydration, which can be very dangerous in babies and young children.

Symptoms of dehydration include:

- A decrease in urination (peeing less often)
- Frequent thirst
- Dry mouth and throat
- Feeling dizzy when standing up

A dehydrated child may also cry with few or no tears and be very sleepy or fussy. Dehydration can happen within six hours after the illness starts. Contact your health care provider immediately if you think your child is becoming dehydrated.

## STAY UP TO DATE WITH YOUR VACCINATIONS



Rotavirus spreads easily. Good hygiene like hand washing and cleanliness are important, but are not enough to control the spread of the disease. The rotavirus vaccine is the best way to protect your child against rotavirus. The rotavirus vaccine is part of the publicly funded vaccine schedule and offered free to all people in Ontario.

**IT TAKES ALL OF US TO PROTECT EACH OF US.** Talk to your health care provider or your local public health unit about the rotavirus vaccine. For information about Ontario's immunization schedules, please visit [Ontario.ca/vaccines](https://www.ontario.ca/vaccines)