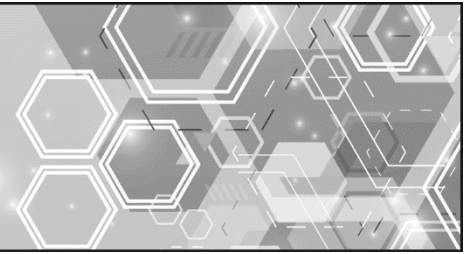




Durham Region Health Department **Facts about...**



Diarrhea

What is it?

Diarrhea is a condition of frequent, loose, watery or semi-liquid bowel movements, so the stool will often take the shape of its container. Diarrhea normally lasts 24-48 hours and then goes away on its own, often without treatment. Diarrhea lasting for more than 2 days may be a sign of a more serious problem. Diarrhea is usually related to a sign of an infection, such as rotavirus, bacteria such as shigella, and parasites such as giardia and cryptosporidium. Bowel disorders and food sensitivities may also cause diarrhea.

How is it spread?

Viruses and bacteria can survive for long periods of time on hands and for hours to months on surfaces. These germs may be easily spread directly by the fecal-oral route, or indirectly by touching contaminated surfaces such as toys or objects. Fecal contamination of surfaces is common in child care settings, especially in the infant/toddler areas. Improper handwashing, poor personal hygiene and environmental sanitation are common factors.

What do I look for?

Diarrhea causes more bowel movements than normal, and stools that are unformed and more watery than usual. Other symptoms include fever, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, cramps, and blood and/or mucus in the stool.

Diarrhea can cause dehydration which is particularly dangerous in children and the elderly.

How is it treated?

Some bacterial and parasitic diarrhea can be treated with antibiotics. Diarrhea caused by a virus will not respond to antibiotic treatment. Treatment for diarrhea at the minimum must include rehydration. If replacement fluids are lost due to vomiting and/or diarrhea over a long period of time, seek medical attention.

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If you require this information in an accessible format, contact 1-800-841-2729.



How can I protect myself?

- Wash your hands well by rubbing together for at least 20 seconds with warm water and soap after using the washroom, changing diapers and/or cleaning up diarrhea and before and after eating, preparing or handling foods.
- Until at least 48 hours without symptoms (i.e., bowel movements have returned to normal), anyone ill with diarrhea should:
 - stay home
 - not prepare or serve any food for others
 - not visit hospitals, child care centres, long-term care and retirement homes
- If the agent, disease or type of germ that caused the diarrhea is known, other disease specific exclusions may apply in certain settings.
- Exclusion guidelines may be different for healthcare workers, food handlers, and individuals working with children.
- Frequently clean and disinfect common use surfaces such as keyboards, phones, bathroom fixtures, toys, doorknobs, etc.
- Drink plenty of water to keep hydrated and seek medical attention as required.
- Anyone ill with bloody diarrhea should seek immediate medical attention.
- Child care staff should follow proper diapering procedures when a child has had a bowel movement. See Durham Region Health Department's [diapering procedure](#) poster for further information.

More information can be obtained from

Durham Health Connection Line
905-668-2020 or 1-800-841-2729

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