

## Avoiding Gastro

Now we are well into winter, gastro is starting to emerge! What is gastro and how can we avoid it?

### What is Gastro?

- Gastro is an illness caused by infection and inflammation of the digestive system.

### What Causes Gastro?

- The most common cause at this time of year is a virus such as norovirus.
- Other causes of gastro include bacterial infection, parasites such as giardia and some medications.

### What are the Symptoms of Gastro?

- The symptoms are pretty well known: diarrhoea, nausea and vomiting, stomach cramps, bloating, loss of appetite and fatigue.
- There may also be headaches, chills and fever and in rare cases, pus or blood in the stools.

### How is Gastro Spread.

- Gastro occurs when we put something infected with the virus in our mouth. There are three common ways this can happen:
  - From person to person. This may occur: by close personal contact with an infected person, contact with infected faeces or the vomit or if you have to clean up after a sick person. You can also catch it by touching contaminated surfaces such as a bench top, taps, toilet flush handles or soiled clothing then touching your mouth.
  - Drinking contaminated water or eating food grown in, washed with or prepared with contaminated water – this may be important if you are camping!
  - Eating contaminated food or drinking contaminated fluids.

### How Long Does Gastro Last?

- Most people become sick within 3 days of being infected and will be sick for up to another 3 days. People remain infectious for several days after their symptoms have stopped.

### How Do You Avoid Catching Gastro?

- Wash your hands – a lot! Before preparing food, before eating, after going to the toilet, after changing nappies or handling soiled clothing. Wash your hands in warm water with soap for at least 15 seconds. If you are out and can't wash your hands, use alcohol sanitiser.
- Don't let infected people prepare food. Wash and thoroughly cook all raw food. If reheating food, make sure the internal temperature of the food reaches 75 degrees.
- If cleaning up vomit or diarrhoea, or cleaning soiled clothes or linen, use a solution of one cup of bleach in a bucket of water. Cover the vomit or faeces with the solution or soak the clothes in the bucket and leave for 10 minutes. Wear gloves while handling any soiled clothes or cleaning up the vomit or diarrhoea. Use paper towels to clean surfaces or floors and immediately dispose of them. Wash your hands afterwards.
- If eating out in a food court or travelling on a plane, wipe down the table with an antiseptic wipe. Use alcohol sanitiser to clean your hands. If you can, soak the cutlery in hot water (e.g. a pot of tea). Eat only hot, cooked food and drink only bottled drinks.

### When Should You Go to the Doctor?

- If you can't keep anything down (including water), become very dehydrated, light headed or experience heart palpitations, see a doctor immediately.

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