Coping with tummy bugs

Advice for parents/carers on dealing with an episode of diarrhoea and/or vomiting

Dettol

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Looking after your child, protecting your family

Healthy hygiene

With over 80 years' expertise in hygiene and a shared interest in protecting infants and young children from infections, Dettol, together with the Community Practitioners' and Health Visitors' Association (CPHVA), has developed this leaflet to help you care for your child when they have a tummy bug and help prevent it spreading to others.

Tummy bugs

The medical term for a tummy bug is gastroenteritis. The main symptoms are diarrhoea and vomiting, but fever and/or tummy ache are common too. Young children are more likely to pick up tummy bugs as their immune systems aren't yet fully developed and they often forget to wash their hands after going to the toilet or before eating.

Tummy bugs are often caused by a virus, such as norovirus or rotavirus*, which can be spread from the hands of an infected person when they touch other people or surfaces. 'Food poisoning' can also be a cause of gastroenteritis and occurs when food is eaten that has been contaminated with bacteria such as *Campylobacter*, *Salmonella* or *E. coli*.

Caring for your sick child

Tummy bugs *can* be serious due to the risk of dehydration (loss of fluid), but in most cases your child will recover within a few days to a week without the need for any specific treatment.

Minimise contact with others

Keep your child away from school/nursery for at least 48 hours after the last episode of sickness or diarrhoea. If your child becomes unwell at school/nursery you will need to collect them as soon as possible, so make sure the school /nursery has up-to-date contact details for you, including emergency contacts.

Keep your child away from other public places like hospitals (unless your child is being treated there) and care homes. You should wait two weeks after the last episode of diarrhoea before taking your child swimming.

Offer plenty to drink

Your child can lose a lot of fluid when they have sickness and/or diarrhoea, so encourage them to drink regularly. Avoid fruit juice and fizzy drinks though, as these can make diarrhoea worse. If your child is having difficulty keeping any fluid down, try smaller amounts more often.

If you think your child is becoming dehydrated (see right for signs of dehydration), you can give them rehydration solution. There are several different products available, which you can buy over-the-counter from your pharmacy. Ask your pharmacist or GP for advice on the most suitable one for your child.

*As part of the national childhood vaccination programme, all babies are offered an oral vaccine against rotavirus - given in two doses at age 2 and 3 months.

Seek medical advice if you are concerned

Children at a higher risk of dehydration include young babies, those with severe or prolonged diarrhoea and/or vomiting and those who are unable to keep fluids down.

You should seek medical advice if your child:

- is under 6 months of age
- has been abroad recently
- is bringing up/passing blood
- has been vomiting for more than three days or had diarrhoea for more than a week
- is showing signs of a more serious illness, such as a high temperature, shortness of breath, swelling or pain in the stomach, a rash that does not fade when you press a glass against it, or any other signs that concern you
- is showing signs of dehydration (see box below).

If your GP is unavailable, contact your local out-of-hours service or NHS 111/NHS Direct Wales 0845 46 47 for advice.

Signs that your child is dehydrated

- Urinating less often
- Unusually irritable or sleepy
- Skin is blotchy or unusually pale
- Cold hands and feet
- Fast breathing
- Dry mouth
- Few or no tears when crying (babies)
- Sunken eyes, and in babies a sunken soft spot (fontanelle) on their head.

If your child is showing any of these signs, seek medical advice.

Stop germs spreading at home

Tummy bugs can spread very easily, so good hygiene around the home is essential.

Wash hands thoroughly and often

Encourage good hand washing using soap (liquid soap, ideally) and warm running water and drying hands properly with a clean, dry towel. Reinforce the importance of *always* washing hands after going to the toilet and before eating.

Disinfect surfaces

Clean and disinfect the toilet after every bout of sickness or diarrhoea. Also disinfect surfaces you touch frequently, such as door handles, taps, the toilet flush handle, and places where food is prepared. Remember to store all cleaning products out of reach of children.

Don't share

Make sure every family member has their own towel and face cloth to avoid spreading germs. Also avoid sharing cups and cutlery during an outbreak of diarrhoea and vomiting.

Clean up spills quickly and thoroughly

Spills of vomit or diarrhoea are inevitable with young children, so it's worth having a few supplies ready, just in case. It's a good idea to have a designated 'D&V' bowl or bucket, disposable gloves and cloths, waste bags, detergent and disinfectant.

Tips for cleaning up a spill

- Wearing disposable gloves, use a designated roll of kitchen towel to soak up as much as possible, putting it straight into a waste bag. Seal the bag and put into your outside bin.
- Clean the soiled surface with detergent and warm water to remove any remaining vomit or diarrhoea, then apply a suitable disinfectant to kill germs.
- Wash soiled clothing and bedding on a hot wash (at least 60°C) or with anti-bacterial laundry disinfectant or sanitiser added to kill germs.
- Put any contaminated toys into a sealed plastic bag until they can be cleaned and disinfected.

Dettol helps to safeguard the health of families and their loved ones through good hygiene. We are passionate about health and work with partners and medical associations around the world to promote good hygiene.

Let's do more for health together. For healthy tips and more, visit our website at **www.dettol.co.uk**.

Dettol CPHVA unite in health

www.unitetheunion.org/cphva

Use biocides safely. Always read the label and product information before use.

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