

# Gastroenteritis FactSheet

HS02-041B (12-05)



Gastroenteritis is an illness that affects the stomach and intestines. Symptoms may include vomiting, diarrhea, stomach cramps, headache, and fever.

## Preventing Gastroenteritis

To prevent gastroenteritis:

- **Always wash your hands:**
  - before preparing foods;
  - after using the toilet; and
  - after changing diapers.
- Do not eat raw meat. Always make sure meat is completely cooked.
- Do not let foods sit out for a long time. **Keep cold foods cold and hot foods hot** so bacteria will not grow in them.
- Refrigerate and freeze foods in shallow containers for complete cooling.
- Clean cutting boards and items used to prepare raw foods before using them again.

If you are camping or hiking and need to drink water from lakes, rivers, or streams, boil the water for one minute, treat it with chlorine or iodine, or use an iodine-based water filter system. For the iodine treatment, it is best to use water germicidal tablets containing tetraglycine hydroperiodide, which releases iodine when dissolved in water, with a ratio of one tablet to one quart of water. If the water is especially cold, or cloudy use two tablets per quart. Once the tablet(s) are added, cover the drinking container loosely with its cap, and wait three minutes, then shake the container and allow some spillage to moisten the cap threads, then tighten the cap and wait ten minutes, after which the water will be drinkable. Be aware that some people are allergic to iodine and persons with thyroid trouble or pregnant women are

advised to consult their doctor before use. Iodine should not harm you so long as its use is confined to a few times per year and should not be used for more than a few days at a time. Iodine tablets also lose their strength over time and must be replaced periodically. In an emergency, household bleach can be used at a ratio of ten drops of bleach per gallon of water, or a teaspoon per five-gallon container. Mix and let stand for 30 minutes. While this is better than nothing, chlorine bleach is not totally effective.

Finally, disgusting muddy water treated with iodine tablets stays disgusting and muddy.

If you travel in developing countries, only drink bottled water or treat the water like you would when camping. Do not use ice made from untreated water and do not brush your teeth with tap water. If you eat fruit or vegetables make sure they have been peeled, cooked, or washed in water treated with chlorine or iodine. Do not eat foods if you are not sure that they are clean and safe.

## If You Get Gastroenteritis

Gastroenteritis is caused by many things including bacteria, viruses, toxins, and parasites. The length of time you are sick depends on the cause of your illness.

Most people get well in two or three days without seeing a doctor.

Some people become dehydrated from losing too many fluids during vomiting and diarrhea. They may have trouble eating. Drinking lots of water and eating foods like bananas, rice, applesauce, and crackers can help prevent dehydration. Alcohol or soft drinks may make the dehydration worse.

## Treatment

To treat mild dehydration in people of all ages, use oral rehydration (drink water) or drink maintenance



solutions – more commonly known as Isotonic, or sports drinks.

Promptly see a doctor if:

- you cannot eat or drink
- you become dizzy
- you have a high fever
- you have diarrhea for more than two days
- you have bloody diarrhea
- your baby has a high fever or sunken eyes.

Some over-the-counter medicine can make you more sick so check with your doctor before taking any.

**Remember: To prevent gastroenteritis-always wash your hands**

This publication was developed in cooperation with the Texas Department of Health.

Disclaimer: Information contained in this training program is considered accurate at time of publication.