

Rotavirus

What you need to know

Rotavirus is a common cause of diarrhoea in babies and children before the age of 5 years. In some cases the infection may be mild, causing loose stools for a short time, but typically rotavirus starts abruptly with fever and vomiting followed by watery diarrhoea that may lead to dehydration. No specific antiviral therapy is currently available against rotavirus. Rotavirus is not the only cause of diarrhoea, but it is one of the most common and serious.

Why can dehydration be serious for babies and small children?

Vomiting and diarrhoea can lead to dehydration because of rapid loss of fluids, which can deplete the body of water and the salts (or electrolytes) it needs.

Babies under one year of age, and especially those with fever, become dehydrated most easily. **It is sometimes necessary to hospitalize sick children so they can be rehydrated** with intravenous fluids. If rehydration is not provided, a child may even develop convulsions or go into shock, which in rare cases can be life-threatening.

Can good hygiene and sanitation prevent my child from being exposed to rotavirus?

It is difficult to keep young children from being exposed to rotavirus. Those who are infected with rotavirus shed the virus in their stools. The disease is spread mainly through contact with contaminated stool, which usually happens when a child touches stool, objects or surfaces contaminated with rotavirus and puts their fingers in their mouth. Good hygiene, like handwashing and cleanliness, are important, but are not enough to control the spread of the disease.

The best way to protect your child against rotavirus is to make sure they are vaccinated.



Will the rotavirus vaccination prevent my child from getting diarrhoea?

No. Rotavirus is not the only cause of diarrhoea in young children, so some may still become unwell from other viruses and bacteria. About **nine out of 10 children who get the vaccine will be protected from severe rotavirus illness** and hospitalization.

When can my child get vaccinated against rotavirus?

The rotavirus vaccines currently available are live, oral, attenuated (weakened) vaccines. They are given as part of routine childhood vaccination for babies and should be administered as soon as possible after 6 weeks of age. Any missed doses can be administered up to 24 months of age.

Your baby needs two rotavirus vaccinations at least four weeks apart to be fully protected.



Is it OK to breastfeed my baby after the vaccination?

Yes. There are no problems linked with breastfeeding babies who have recently had the rotavirus oral vaccine.

What are the possible side effects of rotavirus vaccine?

Most babies who get vaccinated against rotavirus do not have any side effects.

Some can have minor side effects, such as having temporary mild diarrhoea or vomiting, which go away on their own.

There is a very small risk of intussusception, a type of bowel blockage that can be treated in hospital. With prompt treatment, almost all babies who develop intussusception recover fully. The risk of intussusception is about 1-6 per 100,000 vaccinated babies.

The vaccine is offered to children up to 24 months of age because **the benefits of the rotavirus vaccine outweigh the small risk.**