This leaflet is to tell you about **Viral Gastroenteritis**. Although this illness usually doesn't cause any long term problems, it is an unpleasant condition while it lasts. **Now read on....**

What is Viral Gastroenteritis?

Viral Gastroenteritis is a term that covers a variety of viral infections that cause diarrhoea and other stomach upsets. The common viruses causing Viral Gastroenteritis are Norovirus, Rotavirus, Adenovirus and Astrovirus. Norovirus, which is also known as Winter Vomiting Disease, affects all age groups but can be particularly problematic in schools, care homes and other residential settings. The other viruses mainly affect infants and school children.

How is Viral Gastroenteritis caught?

Infections are caught either from another person, from a surface contaminated with the virus or from food. The virus can survive in the environment for several days. These viruses are rarely caught from an animal. It is very easy to catch because the vomit and diarrhoea of an infected person contains millions of virus particles, while the number needed to transmit Norovirus infection can be as low as 10-100. The time from infection to the development of symptoms is usually one or two days, occasionally up to four days. Viral Gastroenteritis remains infectious during the stage of active vomiting or diarrhoea and for some days afterwards. People with impaired immune systems may excrete virus for longer.

What are the symptoms of Viral Gastroenteritis?

Typically the symptoms of Viral Gastro-enteritis are diarrhoea, vomiting and flu-like symptoms such as fever, headache and muscle pains. Norovirus is unusual in that its main, and sometimes only symptom is vomiting. Most illnesses generally last one to four days. Severe cases of Viral Gastroenteritis, as with all other causes of diarrhoea, can lead to dehydration and need admission to hospital.

How do I know if I have Viral Gastroenteritis?

Many different kinds of diseases can cause diarrhoea and so, to make a definite diagnosis, a stool sample must be examined in the laboratory.

How is Viral Gastroenteritis treated?

Viral Gastroenteritis, in line with many viral infections, cannot be treated with antibiotics. It is most important that an affected person gets sufficient fluid intake while they have diarrhoea. Food intake over this time is much less important.

What can be done to prevent Viral Gastroenteritis?

Viral Gastroenteritis is easily caught from another person so strict hygiene in the household is important, particularly when changing nappies,

soiled bedding and clothes. Some viruses can be caught by inhaling tiny vomit particles so particular care is needed in dealing with or cleaning up after a sick person. A 'hot wash' (60oC or hotter) destroys any virus on clothing/bedding. The virus is often transmitted from one infected child to another by contaminated hands or objects. Regular and thorough hand washing, especially before preparing or eating food or drink, will help to prevent further spread of the infection. Wash contaminated surfaces such as toilet flush handles, taps and door handles with detergent followed by a diluted bleach solution. Soft furnishings that have been soiled can be steam cleaned if bleaching would damage them.

Anyone who suffers symptoms of Viral Gastroenteritis should not attend nursery, school or work. In particular there are several groups of people that should not return to school/work until 48 hours after the symptoms of Viral Gastroenteritis have ceased. They should contact their school/employer/supervisor and advise them that they are unwell.

These groups are:

Children under five years or any person of any age who cannot maintain good personal hygiene
Those who work with food
Those who work with vulnerable persons e.g. children, elderly persons or anyone who is in poor health.

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