



# Diarrhea (infectious)

Diarrhea is an increased number of stools (compared with a person's normal pattern), along with decreased stool form or watery, bloody, and/or mucus-containing stools. Diarrhea often is a symptom of an infection caused by pathogens such as bacteria, parasites, or viruses.

## School health and childcare provider information

### Cause

Many bacteria, parasites, and viruses can cause diarrhea. Examples include:

Bacteria: *Salmonella*, *Shigella*, *Campylobacter*, *E. coli* O157:H7

Parasites: *Giardia*, *Cryptosporidium*

Viruses: Norovirus, rotavirus, enterovirus

### Symptoms

In addition to diarrhea, there may be blood and/or mucus in the stool. Other symptoms may include nausea, stomach pain, vomiting, and fever.

### Spread

Pathogens leave the body through the stool of an infected person and enter another person when hands, food, or objects (such as toys) contaminated with stool are placed in the mouth. Spread can occur when people do not wash their hands after using the toilet or changing diapers. Spread can sometimes occur whether or not an infected person feels sick.

### Incubation

Varies by pathogen. It may take from 1 day to 4 weeks (sometimes longer) from the time a person is exposed until symptoms start.

### Contagious period

Varies by pathogen. As long as pathogen is present in the stool, a person can pass the pathogen to other people.

### Exclusion

#### *Childcare*

Until 24 hours after diarrhea has stopped. The length of time may vary depending on the pathogen. For some infections, the person must also be treated with antibiotics or have negative stool tests before returning to childcare. See fact sheet for specific organism when known.

## Diarrhea

### *School*

None, unless the child is not feeling well and/or has diarrhea and needs to use the bathroom frequently. Exclusion may be necessary during outbreaks.

Anyone with diarrhea should not go in lakes, pools, splash pads, water parks, or hot tubs until after diarrhea has stopped.

Staff with diarrhea may be restricted from working in food service. Call your local health department to see if these restrictions apply.

## Diagnosis

Recommend that parents/guardians call their health care provider if their child has symptoms. A lab test (stool exam or culture) may be done to determine the cause.

## Treatment

Treatment will depend on which pathogen is present.

## Prevention/Control

- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and warm running water after using the toilet, changing diapers, and before preparing or eating food. **Thorough handwashing is the best way to prevent the spread of communicable diseases.** Staff should closely monitor handwashing of all children after they have used the bathroom or have been diapered.
- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and warm running water immediately after handling pets or other animals.
- Clean and sanitize mouthed toys, objects, and surfaces at least daily and when soiled (see Section 2).
- Avoid swallowing water when in lakes, pools, splash pads, water parks, or hot tubs.
- Food safety
  - Thoroughly cook all foods that come from animals, especially poultry. Make sure meat is cooked throughout (no longer pink) and any juices run clear.
  - Store all uncooked meat and poultry separately on a shelf lower than any other foods in the refrigerator.
  - Do not drink unpasteurized milk or unpasteurized juices.
  - Wash and disinfect all cutting boards, countertops, knives, utensils, and dishes that were used for raw meat or poultry before using with already cooked foods and with uncooked foods, such as fruits or vegetables.
  - Always wash hands, cutting boards, countertops, utensils, and dishes between uncooked and cooked foods.
  - Do not let children serve or prepare food for others in the childcare or school setting.
  - Minimize self-service food items in the school cafeteria and classroom (e.g., salad bars, trays of fruit, trays of desserts, etc.).

## Diarrhea

For more information, call Hennepin County HSPHD-Epidemiology at (612) 543-5230 or call your local health department.

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