

DIARRHEAL ILLNESS

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 infection caused by germs such as bacteria, parasites, or viruses.

CAUSE

Many bacteria, parasites, and viruses can cause diarrhea. Some examples are:

- Bacteria: Salmonella, Shigella, Campylobacter, E. coli O157:H7
- Parasites: Giardia, Cryptosporidium, Cyclospora
- Viruses: Norovirus (Norwalk-like), Rotavirus, Enterovirus

SYMPTOMS

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

SPREAD

Infectious germs 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 occur whether or not a person feels sick.

INCUBATION (time from exposure to onset of symptoms)

Varies by germ; may take from 4 hours to 4 weeks (sometimes longer)

CONTAGIOUS PERIOD

As long as infectious germs are present in the stool, a person can pass the germs on to other people.

EXCLUSION

Child care and School: Until 24 hours after the diarrhea has stopped. Except Norovirus: until 48 hours after the diarrhea and/or vomiting has stopped.

Everyone with diarrhea should not use swimming beaches, pools, spas, water parks, or hot tubs for at least 72 hours after diarrhea has stopped. Staff with diarrhea may be restricted from working in food service for up to 72 hours.

DIAGNOSIS

Recommend parents/guardians call their healthcare 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 germ is present. Vomiting and diarrhea may lead to dehydration, which may be a medical emergency. Ask a healthcare provider how to prevent dehydration.

PREVENTION/CONTROL

- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and warm running water after using the toilet and changing diapers and before preparing or eating food. Staff should closely monitor handwashing of all children after children have used the bathroom or have been diapered.

- Clean and disinfect diapering area and potty chairs after each use and bathroom toilets, sinks, and toys at least daily and when soiled.
- Clean and sanitize mouthed toys, objects and surfaces at least daily, and when soiled.

For more information please contact Contra Costa Public Health at 925-313-6740 and visit our website at <http://cchealth.org/cd/>