

Children's HEALTH

Advice For Parents On Recognizing A Common And Potentially Serious Childhood Disease

(NAPSA)—Raising an infant is generally a happy time, but not always easy. There are feedings, diaper changing, teething and, unfortunately, illness. Handling health issues is probably one of the hardest things about being a parent, and one of them no one likes to talk about is diarrhea.

Diarrhea can be a normal part of your child's early years, but many parents don't know that the most serious cases of diarrhea can be caused by a virus called rotavirus. Rotavirus is the leading cause of severe, dehydrating diarrhea in children worldwide and infects nearly all children by age five.

Rotavirus tends to be seasonal, with most cases occurring during the winter and spring. The virus typically moves across the United States in a wave. It starts in warmer climates like the Southwest in November and December and ends up in cooler climates like the Northeast in April and May.

"Parents should be aware of the rotavirus season so they can recognize this common occurrence," said Adele Young, PhD, RN, PNP, fellow of National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners (NAPNAP) and assistant professor of nursing, George Mason University. "When parents know what to look for, they are better prepared to know when to contact their health care provider."



Infants and toddlers are at the greatest risk for severe rotavirus. Diarrhea caused by rotavirus can lead to severe dehydration, which in rare cases can lead to death. In the U.S., rotavirus results in about 50,000 hospitalizations each year.

Rotavirus Transmission— It's Tricky!

There are many different rotavirus strains and the prevalence of these strains not only varies by geography, but also changes from season to season. All children are at risk for rotavirus, but the highest rates of infection generally occur in children under two years of age, who are also at the greatest risk for severe disease. During the first few years of life, a child typically has several episodes of rotavirus. Children tend to gradually develop immunity against the disease after several infections.

Children with rotavirus typi-

cally receive supportive treatment that manages symptoms and complications of the disease. For example, dehydration, a potential outcome of rotavirus infection, is often treated through oral rehydration therapy. In the most serious cases, frequent vomiting makes oral rehydration difficult and can lead to the need for fluids to be given intravenously at the hospital.

Recognizing Your Child's Symptoms

Although symptoms vary, children may experience fever, upset stomach and vomiting, along with profuse watery diarrhea, sometimes multiple times a day. Symptoms typically last three to nine days.

Diarrhea and vomiting can quickly lead to dehydration, so it is important to keep in mind a couple of simple rotavirus reminders: know the symptoms of dehydration; and try to keep your child hydrated.

Keep Your Kids Healthy

Remember, one of the simplest and most important ways to safeguard your child's health during rotavirus season is to know the facts. Keep in mind that you are one step ahead if you can identify the symptoms and know how to care for your child. For more information about rotavirus, contact NAPNAP at napnap.org or speak with your nurse practitioner or doctor. This information was made possible with support from Merck & Co., Inc.