



Gastroenteritis (*gastric flu*)

What is Gastroenteritis?

- 💧 **Symptoms** of gastroenteritis have a sudden onset and comprise of vomiting, watery diarrhoea, as well as mild fever and stomach cramps.
- 💧 The **incubation period** for gastroenteritis is very short, between 8 and 48 hours.
- 💧 Several microbial **bacteria** (*Salmonella enteritis* and *E. coli* O157) and **viruses** (rotaviruses, enteroviruses and adenoviruses) can cause gastroenteritis.
- 💧 Healthy people can recover from such an infection within a few days, but for advanced HIV patients, infants and the elderly, it can be fatal, due to dehydration.

How is Gastroenteritis transmitted?

- 💧 Gastroenteritis is transmitted by:
 - ✓ Eating contaminated food or drinking contaminated water.
 - ✓ The faecal oral route, under unhygienic circumstances.
 - ✓ Sharing the same eating utensils.
 - ✓ Consuming contaminated ice cubes, since these micro-organisms can survive freezing.

How can Gastroenteritis patients be treated?

- 💧 Immediate and urgent rehydration therapy, especially in infants and the elderly.
- 💧 Antibiotic medication is not recommended, unless in the cases of very old or infantile patients, or in the presence of fever and or bloody stools.
- 💧 Vaccination is not possible, due to the large variety of pathogens.
- 💧 Sports drinks or a weak solution of salt and sugar (get more information from your local clinic) can be consumed to prevent dehydration.

How can Gastroenteritis be prevented?

- 💧 Do not drink untreated water and always use clean drinking water containers.
- 💧 Water can be disinfected by adding one teaspoon of domestic bleach to 20 litres of water and waiting at least one hour before drinking.
- 💧 If no bleach is available, water can be boiled vigorously for at least 5 minutes and simmered afterwards for at least 15 minutes, before drinking.
- 💧 Some essential preventative actions are:
 - ✓ Good personal hygiene, such as washing your hands after using the toilet.
 - ✓ Proper cleaning of soiled linen.
 - ✓ Proper sanitation facilities.
 - ✓ Prevent contamination of drinking water, by treating wastes and controlling flies.

Reference: DWAF (2003). Management of water-related microbial diseases, Vol. 1.

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