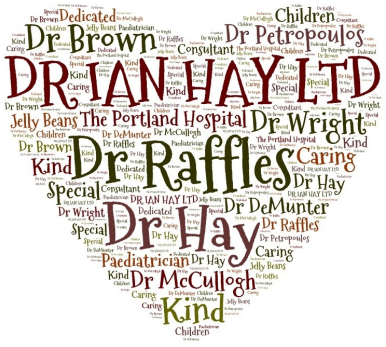



# DR IAN HAY LTD
## CONSULTING PAEDIATRICIANS

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## PATIENT INFORMATION SHEET: GASTROENTERITIS

Gastroenteritis is an infection of the stomach and intestine. In children the most common cause is the rotavirus. Gastroenteritis is also caused by other viruses such as the Norovirus and bacteria, which are responsible for food poisoning.

Gastroenteritis occurs mainly in children between three months and three years. Rotavirus infections occur mainly during winter and spring and are very contagious. Most infections are mild and settle within a week without requiring medical treatment. As young children can get dehydrated, it is very important for them to have plenty of fluids.

**Symptoms:**
The infection usually begins with the sudden onset of vomiting and diarrhoea. Children often have a high temperature and may complain of stomach ache. The vomiting usually stops within one to two days; the diarrhoea may continue for five to seven days. It is important to be on the lookout for symptoms of dehydration. These include dry mouth, sunken eyes, weakness, drowsiness, rapid breathing and passing very little urine.

**Treatment:**
Most children are well enough to be treated by their parents at home. They should continue to take their normal drinks (e.g. breast milk). If they are taking solids these should be restricted to low fibre carbohydrates such as white bread, pasta, boiled rice and potatoes. For the first two to three days of the illness you may find it helpful to give your child small frequent drinks of an oral electrolyte solution such as Dioralyte.

**When to seek medical assistance**:

- If you suspect your child is getting dehydrated (see above).
- If the vomiting lasts more than two days or the vomitus becomes green in colour.
- If the diarrhoea continues for more than a week, or if blood is present in the faeces.
- If they complain of severe abdominal pain.
- The presence of other symptoms which seem unrelated to diarrhoea and vomiting, e.g. a rash.

***Preventive measures:***
**Reducing spread of infection:**

- Carers to wash hands regularly; also after nappy changes and potty cleaning.
- Thorough cleaning of toilet or potty, using a disinfectant after each episode of diarrhoea.
- Children should wash their hands after going to the toilet and before eating.
- Do not share the child's towels with other people in the house.

**Food poisoning:**

- Proper refrigeration of food.
- Thorough cooking of food.
- Cleaning surfaces and utensils with hot soapy water.
- Food not to be eaten beyond the 'use by' date.

**Rotavirus vaccine:**
A vaccine known as Rotarix is licensed for use in babies. It is now included in the UK vaccination programme. Oral Rotavirus vaccine is available via our Practice. Two doses are required. They can be given one month apart and from the age of 6 weeks but must be completed by the age of 6 months as the vaccine is only licensed up to this age.

**Dr Gary Katz**