



Viral Gastroenteritis (Stomach Flu)

Viral Gastroenteritis is an intestinal infection that may cause diarrhea, abdominal cramping, nausea and/or vomiting, and sometimes fever. It is often referred to as the Stomach Flu, although it is NOT related to influenza.

The most common way to develop viral gastroenteritis is through contact with infected people or by ingesting contaminated food or fluids. It can ***spread quickly and easily***; for example if someone with contaminated hands touches a door knob and then you touch the same doorknob and then touch your mouth, you may become infected.

Viral Gastroenteritis typically causes the following symptoms:

- Watery, nonbloody diarrhea
- Abdominal cramps and pain
- Nausea & Vomiting
- Low grade fever
- Muscle aches and headaches

Symptoms typically develop 1-3 days after exposure and usually last 1-2 days.

There is no effective cure for viral gastroenteritis, so prevention is important. The best thing you can do is **WASH YOUR HANDS FREQUENTLY AND THOROUGHLY with soap and warm water**; hand sanitizer does not always work for viruses that cause Viral Gastroenteritis.

When to Come to Student Health & Wellness Center:

- You are unable to keep fluids down for 24 hours
- You have been vomiting for more than 2 days
- You are vomiting blood
- You think you are dehydrated
 - You feel extra thirsty, have a dry mouth, have dark yellow urine or are not urinating regularly, feel dizzy or lightheaded
- You have blood in your bowel movements
- You have a fever above 102F
- You have severe abdominal or back pain

You are welcome to come to the Student Health & Wellness Center at any time, regardless of symptoms. Call 410-516-8270 to schedule an appointment or if you want to talk to our triage nurse. If you call after our normal business hours, your call will be forwarded to our Nurse Advice Line. If you need transportation to the Student Health & Wellness Center, you can call JHU Security at 410-516-7777 to transport you.



How to feel better:

The most important thing to do is drink enough fluids so that you avoid becoming dehydrated.

If you have been vomiting, you want to start with small ice chips or small sips of water or sports drinks every 5-10 minutes. Do not gulp down large amounts of fluids initially as this may cause you to become nauseated and vomit again.

Sometimes drinking from a straw can help reduce nausea.

After you have been able to consume small sips of water or sports drinks, slowly increase the volume and frequency of your fluid intake.

Avoid drinking fruit juices or soda, as this may result in osmotic diarrhea and worsen symptoms. Avoid caffeine and alcohol as well.

If you can keep food down, it's best to begin with a gentle diet. You can include:

- Plain starches, like rice, noodles, potatoes, toast, cereals and crackers.
- Lean meats, cooked vegetables, soft foods (i.e applesauce, bananas)
- Avoid eating foods with a lot of fat, sugar, or dairy which can worsen symptoms.

How is Viral Gastroenteritis Treated?

Most people do not need any treatment and symptoms will resolve on their own.

People with severe dehydration may need IV fluids and medication to reduce the nausea and vomiting.

Viral Gastroenteritis is NOT treated with antibiotics. Antibiotics only treat bacteria and Viral Gastroenteritis is a virus.

What if I am vomiting and I can't take my final exam or hand in my final paper?

- Email or communicate with your professor, as soon as possible, to let them know you are not feeling well and may need an extension.
- You can refer the illness note policy for further information:
<https://studentaffairs.jhu.edu/student-health/faqs/>

Guiding references include: CDC, UpToDate, Mayo Clinic