

# ROTAVIRUS

## (ROE-ta-VI-rus)

Porcupine Health Unit, Community Health Inspection Services, Control of Infectious Diseases

### What is a Rotavirus Infection?

Rotavirus infection is a common source of non-bacterial diarrhea and vomiting in newborns and children in setting where children are in close proximity to one another, for example, hospitals and childcare centres. It can also be a common cause of diarrhea in the elderly. Symptoms include diarrhea, usually preceded or accompanied by vomiting and low-grade fever. The illness usually lasts 4-6 days. This type of infection occurs annually, typically starting late fall and continuing through winter and early spring.

### How is Rotavirus Spread?

Humans are the most likely reservoir for rotavirus. The virus is most probably spread through the "fecal-oral" route by direct contact with contaminated hands or objects. The virus can be encountered in the respiratory tract so there is a possible risk of spread through coughing and sneezing. There is also evidence that indicates that the virus can be present in contaminated water.

It usually takes from 24-72 hours for a person to develop symptoms once they come in contact with rotavirus. It is not usually detectable after the eighth day of infection, though the virus can actually continue to be spread for a longer period of time in the immune compromised and in

elderly individuals. In both developed and underdeveloped countries, rotavirus is associated with about one third of the hospitalized cases of diarrhea illness in infants and young children under 5 years of age.

Outbreaks of rotavirus have also been identified in nursing homes, homes for the aged, and childcare facilities. It can occasionally cause traveler's diarrhea in healthy adults.

### How Do You Prevent Rotavirus Infection?

- **Thorough hand washing is the best prevention.** Make sure hands are properly washed after using the toilet, changing diapers, preparing food, etc.
- People ill with diarrhea and rotavirus-like symptoms should be isolated from others. In daycare settings, dressing infants with a leak-proof or waterproof cover over their diapers has been shown to help decrease transmission of the infection.
- Clean and sanitize washroom surfaces and all hand contact surfaces at least daily or as needed. Rotavirus is resistant to many commonly used disinfectants but is inactivated by chlorine.
- Dispose of feces and fecally

contaminated material carefully.

- When visiting a health care facility or daycare, visitors should wash their hands upon arrival and when they leave.

**For more information,  
contact your local  
health inspector  
or call 1-800-461-1818.**

