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FACT SHEET

Rotavirus

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, rotavirus is the most common cause of severe diarrhea and dehydration in infants and children. Prior to the production of rotavirus vaccines, the United States had approximately 55,000-70,000 children per year hospitalized from infection. Worldwide, it is believed to be responsible for 527,000 infant deaths each year.

Cause: Caused by double-shelled rotaviruses that damage the lining of the small intestine of the infected person.

Symptoms: Fever, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain followed by watery diarrhea lasting three - eight days.

Spread: Transmission occurs by tiny, invisible amounts of fecal matter routed through close contacts and other sources like contaminated water and eating food contaminated with the virus. Infants and children can be affected by putting contaminated toys, caregivers' hands and other objects into their mouths. It has also been found in low titers of respiratory tract secretions and other body fluids. In the United States, rotavirus often occurs in the winter and early spring months. In the United States, most children are affected at some point, by the age of 2-5 years. Adults can be infected, but symptoms are milder.

Incubation: Rotavirus has a short incubation period; about two days.

Contagious: Highly infectious.

Precautions: Always wash your hands with soap and water after using the bathroom, changing a diaper, and before preparing and eating food.

Prevention: Rotavirus vaccine stimulates the body's immune system, helping to protect you once exposed to the virus. Two or three immunizations are required before the age of eight months for full protection.

Diagnosis: Laboratory tests are done on fecal specimens to detect and confirm rotavirus infection; because there is no specific treatment for illness, it is important to keep infants properly hydrated and prevent dehydration. If symptoms of dehydration appear, seek medical treatment immediately as severe cases may require hospitalization and administration of IV fluids.

Recommendations: Rotavirus vaccine for infants is recommended; depending on which vaccine your provider has, a 2-dose or 3-doses regimen is required by **no later than 8 months of age**. Call your provider or local health department for information on recent recommendations.