

# DIARRHEA (INFECTIOUS)

Diarrhea is an increased number of stools (compared with a person's normal pattern), along with decreased stool form or watery, bloody, and/or mucus-containing stools.

Diarrhea often is a symptom of infection caused by germs such as bacteria, parasites, or viruses.

## CAUSE

Many bacteria, parasites, and viruses can cause diarrhea. Some examples are:

- Bacteria: Salmonella, Shigella, Campylobacter, E. coli O157:H7
- Parasites: Giardia, Cryptosporidium, Cyclospora
- Viruses: Norovirus (Norwalk-like), rotavirus, enterovirus

## SYMPTOMS

In addition to diarrhea, there may be blood and mucus in the stool. Other symptoms may include nausea, stomach pain, vomiting, and fever.

## SPREAD

Infectious germs leave the body through the stool of an infected person and enter another person when hands, food, or objects (such as toys) contaminated with stool are placed in the mouth.

Spread can occur when people do not wash their hands after using the toilet or changing diapers. Spread can occur whether or not a person feels sick.

## INCUBATION

Varies by germ. It may take from 1 day to 4 weeks (sometimes longer) from the time a person is infected until symptoms start.

## CONTAGIOUS PERIOD

As long as infectious germs are present in the stool, a person can pass the germs on to other people.

## EXCLUSION

Childcare and School: Until diarrhea has stopped for 24 hours (longer exclusions may apply during outbreaks). The length of time may vary depending on the germ.

For some infections, the person must also be treated with antibiotics or have negative stool tests before returning to childcare.

Consult with Health District. Individuals with diarrhea should not use swimming beaches, pools, spas, water parks, or hot tubs for at least 72 hours after diarrhea has stopped.

Staff with diarrhea may be restricted from working in certain occupations e.g., food service.

Call your local health department to see if restrictions apply.

## DIAGNOSIS

Recommend parents/guardians call their healthcare provider if their child has symptoms. A lab test (stool exam or culture) may be done to determine the cause.

**TREATMENT** Will depend on which germ is present. Vomiting and diarrhea may lead to dehydration, which may become a medical emergency. Ask a healthcare provider how to prevent dehydration.

## PREVENTION/ CONTROL

- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and warm running water after using the toilet and changing diapers and before preparing or eating food. Thorough hand washing is the best way to prevent the spread of communicable diseases. Staff should closely monitor hand washing of all children after children have used the bathroom or have been diapered.
- Clean and disinfect diapering area and potty chairs after each use and bathroom toilets, sinks, and toys at least daily and when soiled.
- Clean and sanitize mouthed toys, objects, and surfaces at least daily and when soiled.
- Clean and disinfect 25 feet surrounding all public vomiting incidents.

**For more information, please contact your local health department.**

[Southern Nevada Health District](#) (Clark County) 775-759-1300 (24 hours)

[Northern Nevada Public Health](#) (Washoe County) 775-328-2447 (24 hours)

[Carson City Health & Human Services](#) (Carson City, Douglas, Lyon Counties) 775-887-2190 (24 hours)

[Division of Public and Behavioral Health](#) (All other Counties) 775-400-0333 (24 hours)

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