

ADOPTION HEALTH SERVICE
Rainbow Center for International ChildHealth

DIARRHEA AND VOMITING

Diarrhea is the passage of frequent, loose, watery stools. It is a common condition during childhood. It can be caused by a variety of different germs including viruses, bacteria, or parasites that infect the intestine. Diarrhea can sometimes be caused by food allergies or by medicines like antibiotics. Nausea, vomiting, bellyache and fever commonly accompany diarrhea.

How does diarrhea spread?

Diarrhea can spread from person to person when the stool of an infected person or objects soiled with the stool is touched and the contaminated hand is placed directly into the mouth. Children in diapers and childcare workers changing their diapers are at increased risk.

What are some of the signs of dehydration?

- ❖ Lethargy, loss of energy (lethargy)
- ❖ Absence of tears or less urine
- ❖ A dry mouth or sunken eyes
- ❖ A sunken fontanel ("soft spot") in an infant

If your child shows signs of dehydration or has persistent diarrhea or vomiting which will not go away, develops belly pain and/or passes blood in stools then seek medical attention immediately.

How do you treat diarrhea?

The greatest risk for children, and especially for infants, is dehydration. Prevention of dehydration through administration of soups, thin porridges, and other safe beverages is advised. Infants with diarrhea who exhibit signs of mild dehydration, such as thirst and restlessness, should be given an oral re-hydration solution (ORS) to drink. This is a packet of salt and carbohydrates that should be prepared following the package instructions and using boiled or treated water. It is widely available abroad. If bloody diarrhea, dehydration, fever in excess of 102° F, or persistent vomiting occurs, seek immediate medical help.

If your child is vomiting, you should not give food and/or fluid for a few hours. After this period of rest, you may start giving your child small sips of clear fluids like ORS. If this is tolerated, you may advance to easy-to-digest foods. This will help prevent more vomiting, which can lead to dehydration.

There are many drugs available to treat diarrhea in adults. Most of these drugs are not recommended for use in children and can cause a number of complications.