

04 August 2023

Health Alert: Rotavirus

The Centre for Disease Control has detected an **increase in the number of rotavirus notifications** in the Northern Territory with 17 cases reported since 1st July 2023. The Majority of cases have occurred in Central Australia and Barkly regions but cases are expected to increase in other regions. Most cases (77%) have occurred in children under 5 years with 53% occurring in children under 12 months. Many of these children have not been fully vaccinated. All clinicians are urged to encourage preventive measures and be alert for further cases.

Collect stool samples for rotavirus testing as well as for microscopy and culture in the first few cases of gastroenteritis to confirm that rotavirus is in your community.

Ensure vaccination is on time: The rotavirus vaccine used in the Northern Territory (Rotarix®) should be given at 6 weeks and at 4 months of age. The 1st dose must be given before 15 weeks of age with the 2nd dose given at least 4 weeks later and before 25 weeks of age.

Handwashing should be reinforced, in particular before preparing meals and after changing nappies. Hygiene posters can be found at; <https://nt.gov.au/wellbeing/healthy-living/no-germs-on-me-campaign>

Exclusion: Children and adults who have diarrhoea should not prepare or handle food for others and must stay away from school, childcare and workplaces until diarrhoea-free for 24 hours.

Clean contaminated surfaces immediately and thoroughly with hot, soapy water and then disinfect the area using a household disinfectant. If possible, disinfect with a freshly made sodium hypochlorite (bleach) solution, prepared according to manufacturer's instructions.

About rotavirus infection

Rotavirus is highly infectious with an incubation period of 24-72 hours. It causes a moderate to severe gastroenteritis among infants and young children and it is usually self-limiting, with recovery in 4-6 days. Children under 5 years are most at risk, but children less than 6 months of age are most likely to develop severe, rapid dehydration. Adults are less commonly affected, but can pass on the virus to others without demonstrating symptoms. Information on rotavirus can be found at:

[Rotavirus | NT.GOV.AU](https://nt.gov.au/rotavirus)

Effectiveness of vaccination

Rotavirus vaccination will not prevent all cases of rotavirus and even if a child is fully vaccinated they may still develop rotavirus, although the disease is likely to be milder and the child will be less likely to require hospitalisation. If children develop disease they should still continue with vaccination if eligible, as only partial immunity is achieved from disease.

Please contact your regional Centre for Disease Control for further advice.

Yours sincerely,

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