

# Immunise against rotavirus

Protect your child



***immunise***

their best protection

This leaflet about rotavirus disease is for parents of babies and young children. It tells you what to do and how to stop the disease spreading if your child has rotavirus. It also explains how immunisation can protect your baby from rotavirus.



**Immunisation  
is FREE.**

## What is rotavirus?

Rotavirus is a very infectious tummy bug.

It can cause:

- vomiting
- diarrhoea (runny, watery poo/tūtae)
- fever
- abdominal (tummy) pain.

Rotavirus is also called gastroenteritis. It can lead to severe dehydration (lack of fluids) in children and in some cases death.

Rotavirus is spread through contact with the faeces (poo/tūtae) of an infected child or adult. It is easily spread if people don't wash and dry their hands properly after going to the toilet or changing nappies.

## How serious is it?

The main risk of rotavirus is that children will become dehydrated because of vomiting and diarrhoea. However, it usually clears within a few days, and most babies and children with rotavirus do not need to go to hospital.

Without vaccination, rotavirus results in 1 in every 5 children needing to see a doctor by the time they are 5 years old, and one in every 43 children needing hospital treatment for dehydration.

Rotavirus is very common. Almost all children will get rotavirus before they are 3 years old if they are unvaccinated. Adults can be infected with rotavirus, but the symptoms are usually very mild.

### Rotavirus frequency and severity without vaccination



= No rotavirus



= Symptoms clear within a few days



= Needs to see a doctor or has 'severe' symptoms



= Needs to be hospitalised (approximate only)

Almost all unvaccinated children will get rotavirus before they are 3 years old.

## Who is most at risk?

It's more serious for these children if they have rotavirus.

- Infants aged between 6 months and 2 years
- Children with a low birth weight who are still under weight
- Children with high-risk medical conditions (eg, heart or kidney problems, or diabetes).

## Immunisation is easy

Immunisation can prevent most rotavirus infections and almost all severe rotavirus infections.

- Rotavirus vaccine is simply squirted into your baby's mouth.
- The vaccines are given to babies as part of their 6 week, 3 month and 5 month immunisations.
- If you miss these dates, you can catch up, but the first vaccine must be given before 15 weeks of age. This is so the course of three vaccines can be completed before babies are 8 months old. Rotavirus vaccine is not given to babies older than 8 months because the risk of serious reactions increases after this age.
- The vaccine protects young children while they are most at risk from dehydration.
- Immunisation is free.





## Rotavirus frequency and severity after vaccination



= No rotavirus



= Symptoms clear within a few days



= Needs to see a doctor or has 'severe' symptoms



= Needs to be hospitalised

Vaccination prevents infection in 70% of infants and severe infection in 98% of infants.

Vaccination results in a 74-90% decline in hospitalisation for rotavirus in children under 2 years and around 85% of severe rotavirus cases are prevented.

# Possible responses to the vaccine

- A common response to the vaccine is mild, temporary diarrhoea and/or vomiting within 7 days after being vaccinated.
- There may be a small risk of intussusception (a type of bowel blockage). This occurs naturally in some babies each year, with no known cause. Intussusception is rare and can be treated in hospital. Signs include severe crying and tummy pain.
- The increased risk, if any, is very small compared to the risks of rotavirus infection.

If you are worried about your baby's response to a vaccine, talk to your doctor or nurse or call the free Healthline service on **0800 611 116** any time day or night.



## Key points

- Immunisation protects against rotavirus.
- Rotavirus is a common tummy bug that is easily caught by children.
- Rotavirus causes vomiting and diarrhoea (runny, watery poo/tūtae).
- The main risk from rotavirus is dehydration. It's important to make sure children with rotavirus have plenty of fluids.
- It's important to wash and dry hands carefully after changing nappies and before touching food to stop the spread of the virus.

**Immunisation  
must start  
before your  
baby is 15  
weeks old.**



# Where can I get more information?

If you want to know more about rotavirus and immunisation:

- talk to your doctor, nurse or medical centre or contact your local public health service

- go to:

[www.health.govt.nz/rotavirus](http://www.health.govt.nz/rotavirus)

[www.immune.org.nz](http://www.immune.org.nz)

- call 0800 IMMUNE (466 863) 9.00am to 4.30pm, Monday to Friday.

For free help after hours (24-hour service), contact Healthline on **0800 611 116**.



This resource is available from [www.health.govt.nz](http://www.health.govt.nz) or the Authorised Provider at your local health district. Revised December 2022. **Code HE2425**



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Health New Zealand

**Te Kāwanatanga  
o Aotearoa**  
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