

SOME CAUSES OF GASTROENTERITIS

Cause	Source	Incubation period	Symptoms	Duration
Bacillus cereus (toxin in food)	Cereal products, especially rice, spices, dust, soil.	1-5 hours	Vomiting, abdominal pain, some diarrhoea	1-2 days
Bacillus cereus (toxin in gut)	Cereal products, especially rice, spices, dust, soil.	8-16 hours	Diarrhoea, abdominal pain, some vomiting	1-2 days
Campylobacter	Raw meat, poultry, untreated milk & water, pets & animals.	1-10 days; usually 2-5 days	Abdominal pain, severe diarrhoea, occasionally vomiting & fever	2-7 days
Clostridium botulinum	Soil, meat, fish and vegetables	8 hours to 8 days; usually 12-36 hours	Central nervous system (difficulty breathing, double vision, nerve paralysis), diarrhoea, vomiting variable can be fatal	May persist for 6-8 months
Clostridium perfringens	Faeces of animal and man, soil (on vegetables), dust, sewage	8-22 hours; usually 12-18 hours	Diarrhoea, abdominal pain 12-48 hours	24 hours
Cryptosporidium	A protozoan parasite found in the faeces of domestic, farm & wild animals, birds & man. Often spread via contaminated water, but person to person or animal to person is possible	5-14 days, usually 5-7 days	Profuse watery diarrhoea, abdominal pain, fever	Up to 3 weeks
Dysentery	Most cases due to person to person spread. Occasionally contaminated food.	1-7 days, usually 2-3 days	Sudden attack of diarrhoea (often with blood & mucus), fever & vomiting	Up to 2 weeks
E. Coli O 157	Raw meat, animals and other people	1-6 days	Abdominal pain, fever, bloody diarrhoea, vomiting	Variable

Giardia lamblia	A protozoan parasite found in the faeces of humans & animals. Often spread via contaminated water, but person to person or animal to person is possible	5-25 days	Diarrhoea, which may be chronic & relapsing, abdominal cramps, nausea. Vomiting not common	Variable, may be chronic
Hepatitis A	Caused by a virus. Outbreaks usually occur when water or food has been contaminated by human excreta. Person to person & contaminated food.	15-50 days	Sudden onset of fever, abdominal discomfort & nausea. May be followed by jaundice (yellowing of eyes, skin & urine)	Up to 4 weeks
Listeria monocytogenes	Found in environment, cattle, sheep, silage, unpasteurised milk products including soft cheeses, pates.	4-21 days, usually 21 days	Ranges from flu like to septicaemia & meningitis. Can cause miscarriage	Variable
Salmonella	Raw meat, poultry, eggs, unpasteurised milk, pets & animals, infected food handlers.	6-72 hours; usually 12-36 hours	Diarrhoea, vomiting, fever, abdominal pain	Up to 3 weeks
Staphylococcus aureus	Human nose, mouth, cuts and wounds.	1-7 hours; usually 2-4 hours	Vomiting, abdominal pain, diarrhoea, fainting 6-24 hours	Less 12 hours to 2 days
Vibrio parahaemolyticus	Sea water, shellfish.	2-48 hours; usually 10-18 hours	Diarrhoea, abdominal pain, vomiting, fever 2-5 days	Up to 7 days
Viral gastroenteritis	Caused by a number of different types of virus including Rota, Norwalk and Small Round Structured Viruses. Especially common in under 5's. Spread by person to person contact, aerosol formation & environmental contamination.	Varies according to the virus 1-10 days, usually 1-3 days	Nausea, vomiting (sometimes projectile) and diarrhoea.	Rapid recovery 24 hours