

Gastrointestinal Infections

What Are Gastrointestinal Infections?

Diarrhea is usually caused by an **infection** in your body's intestines. Infections in the intestines are called gastrointestinal infections. Germs like **parasites**, viruses, or bacteria can all cause gastrointestinal infection. Diarrhea can also be caused by other illnesses, medicine you are taking, or changes in diet. Diarrhea is communicable only when it is caused by germs.

Which germs are responsible for diarrhea depends upon where a person lives. It also depends upon **sanitation** and **hygiene** standards. Countries that have poor sanitation have frequent outbreaks of diarrhea. In developed countries like the United States, outbreaks of diarrhea are most often caused by food poisoning. Sometimes food poisoning happens when bacteria in food that is not handled, stored, or cooked properly gets into a person's body.

What Is Diarrhea?

When you hear the word diarrhea, you probably think about discomfort and embarrassment. Diarrhea is no fun. But nearly everybody gets it once in a while. When you have diarrhea, you have frequent and watery bowel movements.

How Long Are Gastrointestinal Infections Contagious?

Infections that cause diarrhea are highly contagious. They can spread from person to person through dirty hands, contaminated food or water, and some pets. Most cases are contagious for as long as a person has diarrhea. However, some infections can be contagious for even longer.

Can You Prevent These Infections?

The most effective way to prevent the spread of contagious diarrheal infections is to wash your hands often. Dirty hands carry germs into the body. This can happen when you do things like bite your nails or use your hands when eating. It is important to always wash your hands well with soap and water after using the bathroom and

infection: the growth of germs in your body.

parasite: organism that lives and feeds either inside of or attached to another organism and does harm to that organism.

sanitation: the disposal of sewage and waste.

hygiene: things people do to stay healthy.

dehydration: (medical) a condition in which the body does not have enough fluid to function properly.



Drinking untreated water can cause food poisoning.