



Prevention of Diarrheal Illness

Diarrhea can be caused by many types of germs including bacteria, viruses, and parasites. A person should be considered to have diarrhea when they experience three or more loose stools in a 24 hour period. Persons with diarrhea may have additional symptoms including nausea, vomiting, stomach aches, headache, or fever. In order to cause illness, germs have to be transmitted from one person to another. Germs have found many different ways to do this, one of which is fecal-oral transmission. Many common infections are spread by fecal-oral transmission, including *E. coli*, adenovirus, campylobacter, coxsackie virus, giardia, hepatitis A, *Salmonella*, and *Shigella*.

What is fecal-oral transmission?

Fecal-oral transmission means that the germs that cause illness are found in the stool (feces) of an infected person, and are spread to another person. This occurs when a person touches the stool of an infected person or an object contaminated with the stool of an infected person and ingests the germs. An object or surface can appear clean and still have germs that can cause illness. A disease that is spread by the fecal-oral route can be transmitted from person to person, or in food or water. This can happen when a person fails to wash their hands properly after using the bathroom, and then handles food that is eaten by others, or when feces contaminate a water supply.

How can fecal-oral transmission be prevented?

Hand hygiene is one of the best ways to prevent the spread of disease because it is simple and economical. Frequently cleaned hands can prevent infectious diseases from spreading among family members and throughout a community. When your hands are unclean, you can infect others or even yourself by touching your own eyes, nose, or mouth.

When is hand hygiene needed?

- Before, during, and after you prepare food
- Before you eat, including snacks
- Before you insert or remove contacts
- After you use the bathroom or change a diaper
- After handling uncooked foods, especially meat, poultry, or fish
- After handling animals or animal waste
- After you blow your nose, cough, or sneeze
- After you handle garbage or dirty laundry
- When your hands are dirty
- More often when someone in your home is sick

Other ways to prevent fecal-oral transmission include:

- Clean surfaces and toys often. Wash, sanitize, and rinse toys after children have played with them, especially if they were placed in the mouth. Wash and sanitize counter tops, tables, and chairs before preparing or eating food. Keep bathroom and toilet areas cleaned.
- People with diarrhea should not swim. Protect others by not swimming in pools or other recreational water sources if experiencing diarrhea. People can spread germs in the water even without having an "accident". Avoid swallowing water while swimming.
- Do wash your hands and bottom thoroughly with soap and water after a bowel movement or changing diapers. Germs on hands are easily spread to objects, and surfaces such as food and swimming water.
- Avoid food that might be contaminated by washing all raw fruits and vegetables before peeling and eating. Wash all food that will be eaten raw with water from a safe source, and avoid eating uncooked foods when traveling in developing countries where the water supply might be unsafe.