

# ROTAVIRUS

Many infants, toddlers, and children experience episodes of diarrhea. As you may know, diarrhea is an increase in the number of stools per day. There are many illnesses that can cause a child to have diarrhea. Rotavirus is just one of the many viruses; however, it is the most common cause of severe diarrhea from 3 months to 2 years of age.

Rotavirus is an illness that causes severe diarrhea. The virus affects the intestinal tract and can lead to dangerous dehydration. Normally the intestinal tract absorbs nutrients and regulates the amount of water in the body. When the tract is infected by the rotavirus, the intestine can not function properly and too much water escapes from the body through the stool, this causes the severe watery stools.

## *How does my child get rotavirus?*

Rotavirus is a very common illness and chances are that your child will get rotavirus prior to the age of 5. Babies and children who attend day care are at higher risk for the illness. It is spread by contact even before the actual diarrhea begins. The virus can live on hands and other objects, such as toys, where children with the illness have been playing. The virus then enters the body through the mouth. Once the virus enters the body it affects the intestine then leads to severe diarrhea.

## *How do I care for my child with rotavirus?*

Fluid! Fluid! Fluid! And a bland diet. The BRAT (Bananas, Rice, Applesauce, and Toast) diet will help form your child's stool. You may continue the BRAT diet for no longer than 48 hours, then a normal diet may be re-introduced. Apple juice should be avoided; it will increase the amount of water in your child's stool and increase diarrhea. Avoiding dairy or offering lactose free milk or formula may help alleviate some of the diarrhea. Watching your child carefully for dehydration is the most important part of the child's care. If there is any sign of decrease wet diapers or decrease in tear production when he/she cries, your child needs to be evaluated immediately.

## *Can I prevent Rotavirus?*

Hand washing is your strongest prevention against rotavirus. The illness is from direct contact with stools. Always wash your hands at every diaper change. There is a rotavirus vaccination that helps prevent your child from getting rotavirus.