

What is Adenovirus?

Adenoviruses are a group of viruses that can affect different parts of the body depending on the adenovirus type. Types 40 and 41 are common causes of gastroenteritis, especially in infants and young children less than 2 years of age. Occasionally adenovirus infection is the cause of outbreaks in childcare facilities and also amongst the elderly in hospitals and aged-care. Adults are likely protected from antibodies acquired in childhood, although infection in healthy adults can sometimes occur.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms typically begin after an incubation period of 3-10 days and include:

- Diarrhoea (usually mild/watery)
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Abdominal (stomach) pain or cramps
- Malaise/fatigue
- Low-grade fever

Some people with adenovirus infection may show no signs or symptoms, however they are still contagious and can spread the virus to others.

How long does it last?

Diarrhoea from adenovirus can often be prolonged lasting 8-12 days, though most people recover completely without treatment. For some people - especially those with compromised immune systems - diarrhoea may be dehydrating and require medical attention.

How is infection spread?

Adenovirus can spread to others by

- having direct contact with an infected person
- eating food or drink prepared by infected food handlers
- sharing cups or utensils with infected people
- touching contaminated objects and then putting fingers to mouth (e.g. surfaces contaminated with adenovirus particles from faeces).

How can infection be prevented?

People with adenovirus infection are potentially infectious from the first moment they begin feeling sick until a few days after symptoms have resolved, since the virus continues to be shed in faeces and can be passed on to others. In fact the virus may continue to be shed for several weeks after infection, although intermittently and at low levels.

Appropriate hand hygiene is the most important way to prevent adenovirus infection. This is done by thorough hand washing with running water and soap (normal or antiseptic). Alcohol-based hand sanitising gels are effective. Household chlorine bleach solutions can be used to disinfect contaminated surfaces in the home (e.g. bathrooms and high-touch surfaces such as door knobs).