Rotavirus

What is rotavirus?
Rotavirus is the most common cause of diarrhea in the winter. This virus gets its name from the fact that it appears to be shaped like a wheel when viewed under a microscope.

How did my child get rotavirus?
Rotavirus is spread from person to person. Also, the virus can be found on toys or hard surfaces in homes, school, or day care.

What are the symptoms my child will have with rotavirus?
Your child may experience vomiting and/or a low-grade fever for the first 24 hours. Watery, non-bloody diarrhea occurs shortly after and usually lasts about three to eight days. Some children become dehydrated if they do not drink enough or if diarrhea is severe. Signs of dehydration include lack of tears, dry mouth, sunken eyes, and decreased urination.

How is the diagnosis made?
Diagnosis is usually made by testing a stool sample or rectal swab from your child.

What is the treatment?
The main goal of treatment is to prevent or to treat dehydration. Encouraging fluids is very important to prevent dehydration. Rehydration solutions such as Pedialyte® or Infalyte® may be used to treat dehydration. Feeding (formula, milk, and regular foods) should be restarted within 24 hours of the beginning of the diarrhea. (See "Diarrhea" CARE CARD.)

How long will it take for my child to get better?
The diarrhea usually lasts about three to eight days and children may shed virus in the stool for about one week. Once the diarrhea has stopped, your child can return to day care.

Can older children or adults get rotavirus?
Yes, adults usually do not have symptoms of rotavirus but they can shed the virus and become a source of infection.

Since my child had rotavirus, is he protected for life or can he get it again?
Infection can occur in again in future winters.

My child is in day care or school. Do the other children need testing or treatment?
Routine testing of contacts is not done, but if another child or staff member develops diarrhea, they need to contact their physician. The best treatment is prevention. Good hand washing (at least 15 seconds with soap and water) should be done after every use of the toilet or after a diaper change, and before meals. Counter tops, chairs, tables, and toys should be cleaned with a chlorine-based cleanser daily.