



FACT SHEET

Rotavirus and Drinking Water from Private Wells

What is rotavirus?

Rotaviruses are wheel-shaped ("rota-") viruses that cause intestinal illnesses. It is the most common cause of severe diarrhea among infants and children; about 55,000 children are hospitalized from rotavirus infections each year in the United States. Each year, more than 600,000 children die from rotavirus infections worldwide. However, most of these cases are not caused by drinking contaminated water.

How can I become infected with rotavirus?

Rotavirus infection is usually spread from person to person. You can become sick by accidentally eating or drinking something contaminated with the feces of an infected person. The virus can also spread through respiratory secretions and other body fluids.

Where and how does rotavirus get into drinking water?

Rotaviruses are found in every part of the United States and throughout the world. The virus may be found in water sources such as private wells that have been contaminated with the feces from infected humans. Waste can enter the water through various ways, including sewage overflows or sewage systems that are not working properly.

What are the symptoms of rotavirus infections?

Rotavirus infections usually take place in the winter. The most common symptoms of rotavirus infections are vomiting and watery diarrhea. Abdominal cramps and fever often occur, too. Symptoms usually appear within 2 days after swallowing contaminated water, and will last for 3-8 days. You will usually recover without serious or long-term health effects.

What should I do if I think I have a rotavirus infection?

See your health care provider to discuss your concerns.

How is a rotavirus infection diagnosed?

Laboratory tests will determine if rotavirus is the cause of illness. These tests work by identifying the virus in the stools of an infected person. Sometimes they are not performed unless the laboratory is instructed specifically to look for the virus.

What is the treatment for a rotavirus infection?

There is no specific treatment available. To prevent dehydration, you should drink plenty of fluids as long as the diarrhea lasts. In some cases, the infection will go away without any treatment. Consult with your health care provider.

How do I remove rotavirus from my drinking water?

Fully boiling your water for 1 minute (3 minutes if you live in a high altitude) will kill or inactivate rotaviruses. Water should then be stored in a clean container with a lid and refrigerated.

Because of the small size of the virus, using a point-of-use filter will not remove it from water.

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(continued from previous page)

You may also disinfect your well. Contact your local health department for recommended procedures. Remember to have your well water tested periodically after disinfection to make sure the problem does not happen again.

For more information, visit www.cdc.gov/ncidod/healthywater