



Patient Presentation

Diarrhoea is defined as the passage of > 3 loose / liquid stools per day. Acute forms may be associated with [fever](#), nausea and [vomiting](#), cramps, and [dehydration](#). Most cases of acute diarrhoea can be managed at home.

Frequent passing of formed stools is not diarrhoea, nor is the passing of loose stools with a mushy or creamy consistency by breastfed babies.



Acute Diarrhoea (paediatric)

Quick Reference Guide

Access the [full KPP](#) for further information

‘Red Flag’ Signs & Symptoms

Does the patient present with the following?

- [Altered consciousness or responsiveness](#)
- Green bilious [vomiting](#)
- [Shortness of breath](#)
- [Severe / localised abdominal pain](#)
- Non-blanching [rash](#)
- Oliguria / anuria
- Pale / mottled skin or cold extremities
- Tachycardia / tachypnoea / prolonged capillary refill
- [Abdominal distension](#) or rebound tenderness

May require escalation of care if septicaemia or inflammatory bowel disease are considered



Investigations

Most children do not need any investigations, however:

- Consider stool microbiological investigations if:
 - Recently been abroad
 - [Diarrhoea](#) not improved by day 7
 - Uncertainty about diagnosis of gastroenteritis
 - Blood and / or mucous in the stool ([melaena](#))
 - Immunocompromised
- Consider biochemistry tests (urea and electrolytes), full blood count, coeliac disease screen and urinalysis



Treatment Approach

- In infants, continue breast / bottle feeding
- Encourage fluid intake / discourage drinking of fruit juices and carbonated drinks
- Offer [oral rehydration solution \(ORS\)](#) as supplemental fluid to those at increased risk of dehydration

**Consider escalation of care to the
Emergency Department or Specialist
Practitioner if required**

Follow local protocols



Safety Netting Advice

Seek medical attention if:

- ‘Red Flag’ signs or symptoms appear
- Diarrhoea does not settle in 2–3 days
- The child is not tolerating suggested fluids
- The child is deteriorating



Resources

Further information for the public:

- [NICE clinical guideline CG84](#)
- [NICE guideline NG20](#)
- [Diarrhoea and vomiting in children](#), the NHS website



Related KPPs

- [Abdominal Pain](#)
- [Altered Conscious Level](#)
- [Fever \(Pyrexia\)](#)
- [Vomiting](#)
- [Weight Loss](#)