

DIARRHEA

Definition

- Diarrhea is the sudden increase in the frequency and looseness of stools.
- Diarrhea means 2 or more watery or very loose stools.
(Reason: 1 loose stool can be normal with changes in diet.)

Diarrhea Severity Is Defined As:

- **Mild:** 2-5 watery stools/day.
- **Moderate:** 6-10 watery stools/day.
- **Severe:** Over 10 watery stools/day.
- The main risk of diarrhea is dehydration.
- Loose or runny stools do not cause dehydration.
- Frequent, watery stools can cause dehydration.

TRIAGE ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

Call EMS 911 Now

- Shock suspected (very weak, limp, not moving, unresponsive, gray skin, etc)
First Aid: Lie down with the feet elevated.
- Sounds like a life-threatening emergency to the triager

See More Appropriate Protocol

- Vomiting and diarrhea both present
Go to Protocol: Vomiting With Diarrhea on page 342
- Blood in stool and without diarrhea
Go to Protocol: Stools, Blood In on page 307
- Unusual color of stool without diarrhea
Go to Protocol: Stools, Unusual Color on page 309

Go to ED Now (or to Office With PCP Approval)

- Severe dehydration suspected (very dizzy when tries to stand or has fainted)
- Age < 12 weeks with fever 100.4° F (38.0° C) or higher rectally
R/O: sepsis
- Fever and weak immune system (sickle cell disease, HIV, chemotherapy, organ transplant, chronic steroids, etc)
R/O: serious bacterial infection
- HIGH-RISK child (e.g., Crohn disease, UC, short bowel syndrome, recent abdominal surgery) with new-onset or worse diarrhea

- Child sounds very sick or weak to the triager
Reason: severe acute illness or serious complication suspected

Go to Office Now

- Signs of dehydration (e.g., no urine in > 8 hours, no tears with crying, and very dry mouth)
(Exception: only decreased urine; consider fluid challenge and callback)
- Blood in the stool (bring in a sample)
R/O: severe Shigella, Salmonella, Campylobacter, and E coli O157
- Fever > 105° F (40.6° C)
R/O: serious bacterial infection
- Abdominal pain present > 2 hours
(Exception: pain clears with passage of each diarrhea stool)
R/O: acute abdomen
- Appendicitis suspected (e.g., constant pain > 2 hours, RLQ location, walks bent over holding abdomen, jumping makes pain worse, etc)
- Very watery diarrhea combined with vomiting clear liquids 3 or more times
- Age < 1 month with 3 or more diarrhea stools (mucus, bad odor, increased looseness)
R/O: sepsis, necrotizing enterocolitis
- Age < 3 months with severe watery diarrhea (more than 10 per day)
Reason: high risk for dehydration
- Age < 1 year with > 8 watery diarrhea stools in the last 8 hours
Reason: high risk for dehydration

See Today in Office

Note: All of the following symptoms suggest bacterial diarrhea, and the child may need a stool hemocult, leukocytes, and culture.

- Loss of bowel control for > 2 days in a toilet-trained child
R/O: shigella
- Fever present > 3 days
- Close contact with person or animal who has bacterial diarrhea and diarrhea is bad