Gastroenteritis is the inflammation of the stomach and intestines, causing vomiting and watery diarrhea. Infections causing it can be viral (e.g., norovirus, rotavirus), bacterial (e.g., Salmonella, E. coli O157:H7, Campylobacter), or parasitic (e.g., Giardia and Cryptosporidium).

“Food poisoning” is a common cause, and although it is sometimes called “stomach flu”, it is unrelated to the flu (which is a respiratory illness caused by the influenza virus).

**How is it transmitted?**
Gastroenteritis can be highly contagious and often spreads rapidly in closed environments such as residence halls, public spaces, and offices. You can become infected by:
- **Eating** or **drinking** contaminated food or liquids.
- **Touching** objects an infected person has touched (e.g., doorknobs, faucets) and placing contaminated items (e.g., fingers, cigarettes, gum) in your mouth.
- Directly **contacting** an infected person (e.g., sharing food or utensils).

**What are the symptoms?**
Symptoms usually begin 12 to 48 hours after exposure, and most people get better within one to three days. There are no long-term health effects.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Symptoms</th>
<th>Less Common Symptoms</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diarrhea</td>
<td>Fever</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vomiting</td>
<td>Headache</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nausea</td>
<td>Body/muscle aches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stomach pain</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Is there a treatment for Gastroenteritis?**
There is no specific medicine to treat gastroenteritis. Because the majority of cases are viral in origin, antibiotics usually do not help. However, you can take steps to prevent dehydration caused by diarrhea and vomiting and prevent spreading it to others:
- Drink plenty of fluids (oral rehydration solutions are helpful).
- Avoid contact with others when experiencing symptoms and a few days after symptoms have cleared.
- Wash hands often.
- Consult your healthcare provider if your symptoms are severe (e.g., seeing blood in your stool, temperature > 101°F, and/or inability to tolerate fluids) or they persist longer than three days.

**What you can do**
- **WASH YOUR HANDS.** You can get and spread gastroenteritis most easily through your hands.
- **AVOID CONTACT.** If you are feeling ill, avoid contact with others and drink lots of fluids.
- **DISINFECT.** Clean the area and shared equipment around you often with disinfectant cleaners.
- Contact biosafety@usc.edu or (323) 442-2000 for more information.

**Can Gastroenteritis be prevented?**
Yes. Practice the following to avoid exposure and transmission of gastroenteritis.
- Avoid contact with others if you are infected.
- Wash your hands often and thoroughly (at least 20 seconds using warm water and soap). Alcohol-based sanitizers are not effective against many viruses which cause gastroenteritis.
- Wash fruits and vegetables; cook poultry and seafood thoroughly.
- DO NOT prepare food or care for others for at least two days after your symptoms stop.
- Disinfect communal areas and shared equipment with a chlorine bleach solution (5 to 25 tablespoons of household bleach per gallon of water) or other disinfectant effective against norovirus.
- Avoid touching your face and mouth.

**Resources**
- USC Student Health Center
  https://studenthealth.usc.edu/
- US National Library of Medicine
  https://www.medlineplus.gov/gastroenteritis.html
- Mayo Clinic
  http://tiny.cc/mayo-gastroenteritis