



CALHOUN COUNTY

Public Health Department

190 E Michigan Ave
Battle Creek, MI 49014

calhouncountymi.gov/publichealth
269-969-6370

Fact Sheet

Chronic Diarrhea

What is chronic diarrhea?

Chronic (Brainerd) diarrhea is a syndrome of acute onset of watery diarrhea with at least three loose stools per day. Diarrhea can last four or more weeks. The condition was named after Brainerd, Minnesota where the first cases were found in 1983. Patients typically experience 10-20 episodes per day of explosive and watery diarrhea.

Seven outbreaks of Brainerd diarrhea have been reported since 1983. Six of those outbreaks occurred in the United States, five of which were in rural settings.

What causes chronic diarrhea?

Chronic diarrhea has many different causes; these causes can be different for children and adults. Although it is thought to be an infectious agent, intensive searches for bacterial, parasitic, and viral pathogens have been unsuccessful so far. The cause of chronic diarrhea sometimes remains unknown.

How is chronic diarrhea spread?

A person drinking water or eating food that is contaminated with stool spreads chronic diarrhea. In general, chronic diarrhea not caused by an infection is not spread to other people.

How is chronic diarrhea diagnosed?

Currently, there is no laboratory test that can confirm the diagnosis. However, a healthcare professional might order a series of tests to exclude other causes of chronic diarrhea. Tests may include blood or stool tests. Stool cultures may be used to test for bacteria; generally, three or more stool samples are collected and examined. Special tests may be required to

diagnose some parasites. If these initial tests do not reveal the cause of diarrhea, additional tests may be done, including radiographs (x-rays) and endoscopy.

What is the treatment for chronic diarrhea?

Currently, there are no curative treatments for Brainerd diarrhea. A variety of antimicrobial, steroids, and anti-inflammatory agents have been tried without success.

Some patients have reported some relief in symptoms with high doses of opioid antimotility drugs.

For diarrhea of unknown cause, the following guidelines may help relieve symptoms. Follow the advice of your health care provider.

- Remain well hydrated and avoid dehydration. Serious health problems can occur if the body does not maintain proper fluid levels. Diarrhea may become worse, and hospitalization may be required if dehydration occurs.
- Maintain a well-balanced diet. Doing so may help speed recovery.
- Avoid beverages that contain caffeine, such as tea, coffee, and many soft drinks.
- Avoid alcohol; it can lead to dehydration.

Are there complications from chronic diarrhea?

Symptoms of Brainerd diarrhea may last a year or more, and typically come and go. The risk of serious complications from chronic diarrhea depends on the cause of diarrhea and the age and general health of the patient. Chronic diarrhea from some causes can result in serious nutritional disorders and malnutrition.

How can chronic diarrhea be prevented?

Infections that cause chronic diarrhea usually can be prevented by:

- Always drinking clean safe water that has been properly treated.
- Always using proper food handling and preparation techniques.
- Always maintaining good hand hygiene, including always washing hands properly with soap and water before handling food and after using the toilet or changing a diaper.

How do I get more information on chronic diarrhea?

Calhoun County Public Health Department

Phone: 269-969-6383

 www.facebook.com/CCPublicHealthDepartment/

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Phone: 800-232-4636 (800-CDC-INFO)

Website: www.cdc.gov/healthywater/hygiene/disease/chronic_diarrhea.html

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Updated 9/2023

This fact sheet is meant to provide general health information and is not intended to be medical advice or otherwise take the place of your doctor's orders or to diagnose your specific health problems. Check with your doctor if you have any questions or concerns about your health.