

Rotavirus vaccine

Rotavirus is a virus that causes severe diarrhea, particularly in babies and young children. It is often accompanied by vomiting and fever. Rotavirus is not the only cause of severe diarrhea, but it is one of the most serious. It causes about 10% of the cases of “stomach flu” but is responsible for over half of the hospitalizations for that kind of illness. Each year in the United States rotavirus has been responsible for more than 400,000 doctor visits, more than 200,000 emergency room visits, 55,000 to 70,000 hospitalizations, and 20-60 deaths. Almost all children in the U.S. are infected by rotavirus by age 5 years.

Better hygiene and sanitation have not been very good at reducing rotavirus disease. Rotavirus vaccine is the best way to protect children against rotavirus disease. About 98% of children who get the vaccine are protected from *severe* rotavirus diarrhea, and about 74% do not get rotavirus diarrhea at all.

Rotavirus vaccine is an oral (swallowed) vaccine; it is not given by injection. It is given as a three-dose series at 2, 4, and 6 months of age. It is not licensed currently for use in children older than 7 months of age.