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, or parasitic. “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).

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, utensils)

What are the symptoms?
Symptoms usually begin 12 – 48 hours after exposure, and most people get better within 1 – 3 days. There are no long-term health effects.

Common symptoms: Less common symptoms:
- diarrhea
- vomiting
- nausea
- stomach pain
- fever
- headache
- body/muscle aches

What do I do if I have symptoms?
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 fluids are most helpful)
- Avoid contact with others while showing symptoms and a few days after
- Wash your hands often
- Consult your healthcare provider if your symptoms are severe, or they persist longer than 3 days

How do I prevent it?

- Avoid contact with others if you’re infected
- Wash your hands often and thoroughly (20 seconds using warm water and soap)
- Wash fruits and vegetables and cook seafood thoroughly
- Don’t prepare food or care for others if you’re infected
- Disinfect communal areas and shared equipment regularly
- Avoid touching your face and mouth

MORE INFO
Engemann Student Health Center:
www.usc.edu/engemann

US National Library of Medicine:
www.medlineplus.gov/gastroenteritis.html

Mayo Clinic:
http://tiny.cc/mayo-gastroenteritis