Table 4

Ten key facts for parents of children with diarrhoea and vomiting

1 Most children with diarrhoea and vomiting can be looked after safely at home.
2 The biggest risk is of dehydration, so it is important to continue to give both usual fluids and extra supplements to compensate for losses.
3 Children can continue to be breastfed, or receive formula milk. These will not make the symptoms any worse.
4 Usual fluids should be supplemented by commercially available ORS solutions which are the correct concentration to be absorbed most effectively. Do not use other fluids or homemade preparations for this purpose.
5 Giving fluids in small frequent quantities by mouth is likely to be more effective than administering large quantities, although this approach requires patience.
6 Most drinks can be given to encourage fluid intake, but fruit juices and carbonated drinks are best avoided as they can prolong symptoms.
7 Children who are recovering from gastroenteritis can return to eating their usual diet as soon as they are able. There is no need to withhold food for any period of time.
8 Symptoms may last longer than expected: vomiting lasts, on average, 1 or 2 days but should have resolved by day 3; diarrhoea has usually settled by 5 to 7 days but may last up to 14 days.
9 It is important to ensure adequate hygiene to prevent spread of infection to other members of the household. Children should not return to school or childcare facilities until at least 48 hours after the last episode of diarrhoea or vomiting.[4]
10 Seek medical advice if the symptoms are worsening or persistent, or there are signs of dehydration.