

8. Dealing with Infectious Diseases



Introduction

Children might be brought to care with symptoms or signs of illness or while in care suddenly develop an illness that has not been diagnosed by a doctor, and that might be potentially infectious or potentially life-threatening for the child. Symptoms may not clearly fit those listed in exclusion diseases making it difficult for the centre staff and nominated supervisor to decide whether to accept or exclude the child from care, and many non-exclusion diseases can make a child too ill to participate in normal care activities.

Purpose

Our centre is committed to providing a safe and healthy environment for all children, staff and any other persons attending the service by: responding to the needs of the child or adult who presents with symptoms of an infectious disease or infestation while attending the service; complying with current exclusion schedules and guidelines set by the Department of Health; and providing up-to-date information and resources for families and staff regarding protection of all children from infectious diseases and blood-borne viruses, management of infestations and immunisation programs.

Goals – What are we going to do?

The way that children interact with each other and with adults in education and care services means that diseases can quickly spread in a variety of ways. Whilst it is not possible to prevent the spread of all infections and diseases, minimising the risk is enhanced through:

- effective hand hygiene;
- exclusion of ill children, educators and other staff; and
- immunisation

Other strategies to prevent infection include:

- cough and sneeze etiquette
- appropriate use of gloves
- effective environmental cleaning.

Strategies – How will it be done?

Effective Hygiene

To minimise the spread and risks of infectious diseases in the centre we will maintain and promote effective hygiene practices, including:

- Correct handwashing technique;
- Cleaning toys and other items that children are likely to put in their mouths, after use;

- a labelled container for mouthed toys will be placed in each room for 0-2 years and 2-3 years.
- Using standard precautions when handling blood, all body fluids, secretions and excretions, dried blood and other body substances (see Contact with and Safely Dealing with Spill)
- Raking sandpits often and/or securely covering them when not in use;
- Washing rubbish bins and nappy buckets regularly;
- Actively promote handwashing and other hygiene practices with children and families and ensure children, staff, volunteers and visitors wash hands correctly with soap and running water. Dry hands with paper towels, individual towels or automatic hand-dryer upon arrival and when leaving the centre and other situations where appropriate (see hand-washing).
- Ensure staff and visitors also use additional barriers such as non-latex single use (disposable) gloves where appropriate.
- Ensure staff always wear gloves where they are likely to be exposed to blood, faeces, urine or other body fluids, including any activity where there might be contact with a child's mucous membranes such as the nose, mouth or genital area, or when handling any items or materials that have come into contact with blood or body fluids.
- Regularly clean the indoor environment of the centre.
 - floors to be swept after morning tea and after lunch
 - toilets to be wiped over as necessary and after lunch
 - toilet floors to be mopped after lunch and as necessary.
 - tables to be cleaned after morning tea/afternoon tea, after lunch and after art/craft activities.
- Clean daily the toilets, nappy change areas, food preparation areas, taps, door handles, flush handles, nappy change surfaces and benches. Use neutral detergent and water .
- Launder daily all soiled linen, towels, face cloths and clothing.
- Ensure children and staff do not share brushes, combs, toothbrushes, bottles, dummies, towels and facecloths.
- Use high absorbency disposable nappies in preference to cloth nappies, especially during outbreaks of diarrhoeal illness. If cloth nappies are used, change nappy cover with each nappy change.
- Ensure safe storage, disposal or laundering of soiled nappies. Use nappy disposal unit provided at the service. (see nappy change policy)
- Separate acutely ill children from well children and keep under supervision until they can be picked up by their family or nominated responsible person.

Exclusion of Ill children, educators and other staff

Infectious Diseases

Exclusion of infectious children significantly reduces the risk of the spread of diseases to other healthy children and centre staff. In order to prevent the spread of infectious diseases through interpersonal contact, our centre will adhere to the exclusion period table, published by the department of Health's most current version of *Staying Healthy: Preventing infectious diseases in early childhood education and care services*.

There are a number of diseases that are notifiable under the Public Health Act to the local Public Health Unit. Please refer to the most current version of *Staying Healthy: Preventing infectious diseases in early childhood education and care services*. **Local Public Health Unit Phone: 1300 066 055.**

To minimise the spread of potential infectious diseases between children, other healthy children and centre staff and to minimise the detrimental impact on a sick child and the ability of the centre staff to safely supervise other children, centre staff will:

- Advise families to always inform you when their child has been sick at home prior to bringing their child to care so you can assess whether or not they are well enough to attend. Refer to the current version of *Staying Healthy: Preventing infectious diseases in early childhood education and care services* to assess whether the child is too ill to attend or needs to see a doctor, inform the family that the child cannot attend until they have recovered or have a certificate from their doctor.
- If you are having difficulty assessing whether a child is ill or not fit enough to attend care, discuss with the family and contact the child's doctor if they consent.
- If you are unable to contact the child's doctor, contact:
 - another local doctor,
 - the local hospital or emergency department
 - the local Public Health Unit
 - ensure all information and calls are documented and an illness report completed
- Refer difficult or unresolved situations in relation to infectious diseases to the local Public Health unit.
- Write an illness report and include any actions and decisions taken regarding excluding a child from care or advising families to take their child to a doctor.
- It is useful for educators and other staff to have some understanding of the signs and symptoms that suggest that a young child may be quite ill and need urgent medical attention. Advise families to take a child with any of the illnesses or symptoms listed below or a child you believe to be acutely ill or infectious to their doctor or hospital. These include the following:
 - **High fever**—a high fever in a young child can be a sign of infection, and needs to be investigated to find the cause. However, fever by itself is not necessarily an indicator of serious illness (see below for more details about fever).
 - **Drowsiness**—the child is less alert than normal, making less eye contact, or less interested in their surroundings.
 - **Lethargy and decreased activity**—the child wants to lie down or be held rather than participate in any activity, even those activities that would normally be of interest.
 - **Breathing difficulty**—this is an important sign. The child may be breathing very quickly or noisily, or be pale or blue around the mouth. The child may be working hard at breathing, with the muscles between the ribs being drawn in with each breath.
 - **Poor circulation**—the child looks very pale, and their hands and feet feel cold or look blue.
 - **Poor feeding**—the child has reduced appetite and drinks much less than usual. This is especially relevant for infants.
 - **Poor urine output**—there are fewer wet nappies than usual; this is especially relevant for infants.
 - **Red or purple rash**—non-specific rashes are common in viral infections; however, red or purple spots that do not turn white if pressed with a finger require urgent medical referral because the child could have meningococcal disease.
 - **A stiff neck or sensitivity to light**—this may indicate meningitis, although it is possible for infants to have meningitis without these signs.
 - **Pain**—a child may or may not tell you they are in pain. Facial expression is a good indicator of pain in small infants or children who do not talk. General irritability or reduced physical activity may also indicate pain in young children.
- Ensure that staff who have symptoms that may indicate a potential illness are replaced and not caring for children and advise them to seek medical advice.
- Exclude a child or staff member with any of the following symptoms (and follow the exclusion periods outlined in the most current version of *Staying Healthy: Preventing*

infectious diseases in early childhood education and care services) which might indicate they have an infectious illness and advise the family to take the child or advise the staff member to go to the doctor or hospital:

- Diarrhoea – if 2 or more children in the service have diarrhoea then the exclusion period goes from 24 hours to 48 hours
 - Generalised rash
 - Enlarged or tender lymph glands
 - Severe cough with fever
 - Scabies, Tinea (“ringworm”), impetigo (“school sores”), or mouth ulcers not yet treated,
 - Mouth ulcers due to herpes simplex virus or coxsackie virus
 - Infection or yellow or green discharge of the eyes or ears
 - Excessive yellow or green discharge of the nose
 - If any other infectious disease is suspected.
- A notice will be placed on centre doors and placed on digital platform advising families that there has been an occurrence of an infectious disease at the service premises.

Fever

In children, a temperature over 38°C indicates a fever. A fever is usually caused by an infection somewhere in the body. Some types of infections that lead to fever include:

- **Viral** (caused by a virus) – around nine out of ten children with a fever will have a viral illness, such as cold, flu or gastroenteritis
- **Bacterial** (caused by bacteria) – such as some ear infections, pneumonia or urine infections.

In order to prevent the spread of infection and ensure wellbeing, children with a temperature above 38°C will be excluded from the service.

Immunisation

- Under the amended NSW Public Health Act 2010, education and care services cannot enroll a child unless approved documentation has been provided that shows the child:
 - is fully vaccinated for their age, or;
 - has a medical reason not to be vaccinated, or;
 - is on a recognised catch-up schedule if the child has fallen behind with their vaccinations.
- To enroll in our service, families must provide a copy of one or more of the following documents:
 - a Medicare Immunisation History Statement which shows that the child is up to date with their scheduled vaccinations; or
 - a Medicare Immunisation History Form on which the immunisation provider has certified that the child is on a recognised catch-up schedule (temporary for 6 months only); or
 - a Medicare Immunisation Medical Exemption Form which has been certified by a GP.
- A copy of their child's immunisation details can also be obtained at any time via:
 - calling the Australian Immunisation Register on 1800 653 809
 - Medicare Online Services
 - requesting a statement by emailing air@medicareaustralia.gov.au
 - by visiting their local Medicare office.
- For more details on Managing immunisation see our *Managing Immunisation Policy*

Immunisation Exempt children

When a vaccine-preventable disease is present or suspected at the service, children for whom the centre does not have a completed immunisation record will be treated as unimmunised.

Non-immune children and Educators will be excluded from the service when there is an outbreak of a vaccine-preventable illness and required to remain away until the service is deemed clear of the illness and the minimum exclusion period has passed.

Roles and Responsibilities

Approved Provider will:

Ensure the service operates in line with the Education and Care Services National Law and National Regulations including:

- Ensuring that where there is an occurrence of an infectious disease at the service, reasonable steps are taken to prevent the spread of that infectious disease (Regulation 88(1)).
- Ensuring that where there is an occurrence of an infectious disease at the service, a parent/guardian or authorised emergency contact of each child at the service is notified of the occurrence as soon as is practicable (Regulation 88(2)).
- Ensuring that information from the Department of Health about the recommended minimum exclusion periods is displayed at the service, is available to all stakeholders and is adhered to in the event of an outbreak of an infectious.
- Ensuring that the parent/guardians and Secretary are informed within 24 hours of becoming aware that an enrolled child is suffering from any of the following 9 vaccine preventable diseases by contacting the local Public Health Unit on **1300 066 055**:
 1. Diphtheria, 2. Haemophilus influenzae type b (Hib), 3. Measles, 4. Meningococcal C, 5. Mumps, 6. Pertussis (whooping cough), 7. Poliomyelitis, 8. Rubella, 9. Tetanus
- Ensuring that a child who is not immunised against a vaccine-preventable disease does not attend the service when an infectious disease is diagnosed, and does not return until there are no more occurrences of that disease at the service and the recommended minimum exclusion period has ceased (Regulation 85(2) of the Public Health and Wellbeing Regulations 2009).
- Notifying the Regulatory Authority within 24 hours of a serious incident including when a child becomes ill at the service or medical attention is sought while the child is attending the service.
- Ensuring that appropriate and current information and resources are provided to staff and parents/guardians regarding the identification and management of infectious diseases, blood-borne viruses and infestations.
- Keeping informed about current legislation, information, research and best practice.
- Ensuring that any changes to the exclusion table or immunisation schedule are communicated to staff and parents/guardians in a timely manner.

Nominated Supervisor will:

- Contact the parents/guardians of a child suspected of suffering from an infectious or vaccine-preventable disease, or of a child not immunised against a vaccine-preventable disease that has been detected at the service, and requesting the child be collected as soon as possible.
- Notifying a parent/guardian or authorised emergency contact person when a symptom of an excludable infectious illness or disease has been observed.
- Ensuring that a minimum of one staff with current approved first aid qualifications is in attendance and immediately available at all times the service is in operation.
- Establishing good hygiene and infection control procedures, and ensuring that they are adhered to by everyone at the service.
- Ensuring the exclusion requirements for infectious diseases are adhered to as per the recommended minimum exclusion periods, notifying the Approved Provider and parents/guardians of any outbreak of infectious disease at the service, and displaying this information in a prominent position.
- Advising parents/guardians on enrolment that the recommended minimum exclusion periods will be observed in regard to the outbreak of any infectious diseases or infestations.
- Advising the parents/guardians of a child who is not fully immunised on enrolment that they will be required to keep their child at home when an infectious disease is diagnosed at the service, and until there are no more occurrences of that disease and the exclusion period has ceased
- Requesting that parents/guardians notify the service if their child has, or is suspected of having, an infectious disease or infestation.
- Providing information and resources to families to assist in the identification and management of infectious diseases and infestations.
- Maintaining confidentiality at all times.
- Provide relevant sourced materials to families.
- Ensuring that an Illness report is completed as soon as practicable as or no later than 24 hours of the illness occurring.
- A notice will be placed on centre doors and placed on digital platform advising families that there has been an occurrence of an infectious disease at the service premises.

Educators will:

- Ensure that any children that are suspected of having an infectious illness are responded to and their health and emotional needs supported at all times.
- Implement appropriate health and safety procedures, when tending to ill children.
- Ensure that families are aware of the need to collect their children as soon as practicable to ensure the child's comfort.

- Maintain their own immunisation status, and advise the Approved Provider/Nominated Supervisor of any updates to their immunisation status.
- Provide varied opportunities for children to engage in hygiene practices, including routine opportunities, and intentional practice.
- Observing signs and symptoms of children who may appear unwell, and informing the Nominated Supervisor.
- Monitoring any symptoms in children that may indicate the presence of an infectious disease.
- Maintaining confidentiality at all times.

Families will:

- Provide Immunisation documentation upon enrolment and as administered.
- Keep their children at home if they are unwell or have an excludable infectious disease.
- Keep their children at home when an infectious disease has been diagnosed at the service and their child is not fully immunised against that infectious disease, until there are no more occurrences of that disease and the exclusion period has ceased.
- Inform the service if their child has an infectious disease or has been in contact with a person who has an infectious disease.

Related Legislation

- Education and Care Services National Law Act: Section 167
- Education and Care Services National Regulations: Regulations 85-88
- Workplace Health and Safety Act 2011
- Public Health regulation 2012
- Public Health Act 2010
- Public Health Amendment (vaccination of children attending childcare facilities) bill 2013

Links to other policies and documents

- Staying healthy: preventing infectious diseases in early childhood education and care services (current version)
- Immunisation toolkit www.health.nsw.gov.au/immunisation/documents/Immunisation-Enrolment-Toolkit.pdf
- Exclusion period for infectious diseases table: www.nhmrc.gov.au
- Illness Report
- Contact with and safely dealing with spills
- Nappy Change
- Hand Washing
- Managing Immunisation

Links to Education and Care Services National Regulations: 85-88

Links to National Quality Standards/Elements: 2.1, 2.3, 6.2, 6.3

Sources

- Staying healthy: preventing infectious diseases in early childhood education and care services (current version)
- NHMRC: Exclusion periods for infectious diseases table
- Workplace Health and Safety Act 2011
- Community Early Learning Australia - CELA