



Hygiene and Infection Control

Protecting and promoting the healthy development of young children is a primary responsibility of carers. Young children are particularly susceptible to illness and infection because their immune systems have not been fully developed. Close contact with other children and carers in childcare settings increases the likelihood of coming into contact with many viruses and germs. So, colds and upper respiratory infections are common!

But infectious diseases can be very serious. Fortunately, many can be prevented and the risk of infection can be minimised. Carers must comply with state and territory regulations on hygiene and infection control, and these shape policies and procedures that reduce the risk of infection. It is important to recognise that these are in place to protect children. **Parents play an important role in supporting carers to reduce the risk of serious infection.**

The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) has identified the **“three most important ways of preventing the spread of infectious disease”** in child care settings (*Staying Healthy In Child Care*, 4th ed., 2005, p.3).

1. Effective hand washing

Everyone should thoroughly wash, rinse and dry their hands:

- Before eating, preparing or handling food
- Before giving medications
- After going to the toilet or changing nappies
- After wiping noses, sneezing or coughing
- After handling rubbish
- On arrival and departure from your child care service

As a parent, you can help protect the health of your child and others, by encouraging careful hand washing at these times. If you are unsure about how to effectively wash hands, look for information posters within the service or ask your child's carer for this information. You can also check this topic at the Raising Children's Network website (www.raisingchildren.net.au), if you have internet access.

2. Exclusion of sick children

Having your child excluded from care may be very stressful for parents, but is one of the most important ways to protect all children. Carers have specific guidelines from their State/Territory Health Department about infectious diseases and exclusion times – ask if you are unsure.

3. Immunisation

Immunisation is generally a very safe means of preventing specific infectious diseases, including many that are life-threatening. Immunisation protects the person who has been immunised, children who are too young to be immunised, and other people who have been immunised but for whom the immunisation was not effective. Because of the real threats posed by serious infectious diseases, it is understandable that certain immunisations may be required by State/Territory Health Department or funding authorities before a child can be accepted into care.

Supporting carers in preventing the spread of infection is really about supporting the healthy development of all children – your own and others.

This Parent Fact Sheet is available in different community languages and can be downloaded from the Early Childhood Connections website www.econnections.com.au

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