

Providing hygienic environments for children and implementing effective infection control methods is essential for preventing the spread of infectious diseases in outside school hours care (OSHC). Staff in OSHC services play an important role in developing policies and procedures and in carrying out consistent practices for infection control. Once practices have been established they can quickly become a vital part of the service's daily routine.

Infection control requirements

Australian States and Territories have licensing requirements and/or national standards that relate to infection control in child care services. These detail the responsibilities of services in providing hygienic environments for children and in minimising the spread of infection.

The Outside School Hours Care Quality Assurance (OSHCQA) *Quality Practices Guide* requires that, regardless of variations that may occur between States and/or Territories, services should act to control the spread of infectious diseases.

Services should regularly seek advice and support on infection control from recognised health authorities. The following websites provide a range of up to date information on hygiene and infection control with links to relevant authorities:

- National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC): www.health.gov.au/nhmrc
- Immunise Australia: www.immunise.health.gov.au
- Food Standards Australia New Zealand: www.foodstandards.gov.au

Why infection control is important

When children spend time in OSHC services they come into contact with a large number of other children and adults. In this environment infectious diseases can spread. Implementing effective infection control practices will help reduce transmission of infection and reduce the risks to children and adults. Infection can be spread in many ways including through contact with the skin, faeces, mouths, blood or body secretions and through airborne droplets from sneezing and coughing. Services can minimise the spread of infection by preventing the entry of germs into the body, for example by effective handwashing and by encouraging the immunisation of children and staff.

Policies and procedures

Effective policies and procedures for infection control should support consistent management and staff

practice to minimise the spread of infectious diseases. Policies and procedures should detail practices that are consistent with recommendations from recognised health authorities and should be dated and sourced to ensure they are up to date and relevant. Policies should be developed and regularly reviewed by staff and management. Family input should be invited. The involvement of these parties will assist in developing a common understanding and agreement about infection control standards in the service.

Services may choose to address infection control through several policies that address areas such as handwashing, food safety, immunisation, exclusion of sick children, cleaning and disinfecting, and cleaning up blood and body fluids. Alternatively, one over-arching policy may be developed that encompasses all aspects of infection control in the service.

Recognised health authorities

A recognised health authority is an organisation that provides information or advice based on recent research, current thinking or State/Territory or Australian Government legislation. This may be an independent organisation with specialist knowledge or a government department or agency.

In some cases there may be more than one recognised authority that can provide advice and support. For example, if the service requires information about strategies for reducing the spread of infectious diseases, they may contact the following:

- National Health and Medical Research Council
- Food Standards Australia New Zealand
- Local council
- State/Territory licensing authority

Recognised authorities can provide information to services such as regulatory requirements, specific advice based on current research and suggestions for policies and practice. Many recognised authorities have websites that are regularly updated.

Keeping staff up to date

Management should support staff to stay up to date with infection control methods to ensure that consistent high standards of hygiene are maintained at the service. The key for staff in maintaining sound and consistent practices is through training and access to current information from recognised health authorities. The service may also find it useful to invite experts on infection control to visit the service to speak with staff.

Keeping families up to date

Keeping families up to date on recommendations from recognised authorities can assist them to follow through with consistent hygiene practices at home. Information can be obtained from recognised health authorities and provided to families through pamphlets, posters or newsletters. These should be readily available in appropriate community languages for access by staff and families. Guest speakers could also be invited to speak to families about infection control issues. Resources and guest speakers can be sourced through recognised health authorities.



Encouraging children to control infection

Children are more likely to be aware of, and understand the reasons for, practices that control infection if they are involved in discussions and decisions. Staff can encourage children's involvement in controlling infection by:

- Role modeling hygienic behaviour and practice to children
- Setting and reinforcing rules for hygiene with children
- Inviting children to have input to the development of the service's policies and procedures for controlling infection
- Encouraging children to follow appropriate hygiene practices such as handwashing, nose blowing, safe food handling and cleaning up

Handwashing and drying

Handwashing is the most effective way to reduce the spread of infection and is particularly important for staff handling food and body fluids. Staff and children need to thoroughly wash and dry hands at the following times:

- Before and after handling and eating food
- After toileting
- After dealing with body fluids
- After wiping noses
- After handling rubbish
- After touching animals

It is also useful for staff and children to wash their hands upon arrival and before departure from the service. This will ensure that germs are not brought into or taken away from the service.

For handwashing to be effective, soap and running water should be used and hands should be thoroughly dried on a single use towel. Children and staff should use liquid soap to wash their hands, rubbing all hand surfaces and wrists for 10 to 15 seconds. The tap may be turned off with a paper towel and then hands should be dried using a new paper towel.

Guidelines for handwashing in child care services are available in the following publications:

- *Staying Healthy in Child Care* 3rd Ed (National Health and Medical Research Council, 2001). A copy of this publication can be downloaded from the NHMRC website. Please note that this publication is currently being reviewed
- *Personal Hygiene for People Working with Food*. This pamphlet can be downloaded from the Victorian Government Health Information Food Safety website: www.health.vic.gov.au/foodsafety

Using gloves

When preparing food or handling body fluids, it is important to note that gloves are not a substitute for handwashing. Gloves can be worn as a barrier when cleaning up body fluids and preparing food, however, hands should still be washed after the gloves have been removed.

Food standards do not require that food handlers wear gloves. If gloves are used, care should still be taken to ensure hygienic practice when handling food and body fluids. For example, even if gloves are worn it may still be preferable to use utensils when serving cooked or ready to eat food. Gloves should be removed, disposed of and replaced if using the toilet, smoking, coughing, sneezing, using a handkerchief, eating, drinking or touching the hair, scalp or body.

Food safety to control infection

Food poisoning and the spread of infectious disease through food can be a serious health problem for children. If food is not safely stored or handled properly, bacteria can multiply to dangerous levels and cause illness. The use of safe and hygienic food storage and handling practices can prevent food contamination and the transmission of bacteria and infectious disease amongst children and adults.

Every staff member that handles food has a responsibility to maintain safe and hygienic food practices. Staff must not handle food when they are suffering from a disease or illness which may be transmitted through food such as vomiting, diarrhoea, gastroenteritis and hepatitis A and E. If staff are unsure about whether they should be handling food they should contact their doctor for advice. Staff should also be diligent in ensuring their body, anything from their body and any clothing does not contaminate food or food surfaces.

The following website is useful for safe and hygienic food handling standards: Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ): www.foodstandards.gov.au

Cleaning and disinfecting

The most effective way to reduce germs and control infection is to wash with detergent or soap. This helps to loosen germs so they can be washed away. The use of disinfectants should be limited as these are not always successful or appropriate in controlling infection. Items should still be cleaned with detergent or soap before they are disinfected. It is important to remember that disinfectants must be clearly labeled and stored safely at all times. For more information regarding the use of disinfectants visit the NHMRC website.



Rubbish bins

Touching the lid or outside of a rubbish bin are common ways to transmit germs and infection. Staff and children should take care to place soiled items in rubbish bins without making contact with the lid or the outside of the bin. Hands should always be washed after handling rubbish or touching the bin, and bins should be washed regularly in hot water and detergent. All bins should have a lid to prevent odours and the spread of germs. Plastic lined bins should be used in any area where spills or soiling may occur, for example in the bathroom and kitchen.

On the spot cleaning

This should be done as soon as spills or mess occur such as directly after meal times, liquid or body fluid spills, and art and craft activities.

Daily cleaning

Daily cleaning is important for areas that children and staff have frequent contact with such as:

- Toilets and bathrooms should be checked for cleanliness at regular intervals during each session
- Floors
- Kitchen
- Tables and bench tops
- Craft and computer tables
- Equipment
- Tea towels and aprons

Weekly or monthly cleaning

This is suitable for equipment and surfaces that are used less regularly by children and staff including:

- Cushion covers
- Dress up clothes
- Sandpits
- Equipment such as lego, playing card, sports equipment
- Shelving

Separate cleaning cloths or disposable paper towel should be used for bathroom, kitchen and play areas. It may be useful to use colour coded cloths for this purpose, for example, green for the bathroom and pink for the kitchen. These should be stored separately.

Cleaning of outdoor play areas should take place regularly. Daily checks should be made to identify and remove any dangerous objects that could spread infection such as syringes, needles and broken glass. When removing these items care should be taken to follow the recommendations from a recognised authority on their disposal.

Disposal of needles, syringes and condoms

The service should develop clear procedures for disposing of discarded needles, syringes or condoms found in the service grounds. These should be based on recommendations from State/Territory health departments. Health officers from the local council may also be contacted for assistance when developing procedures for disposing of these dangerous items.

Children should be advised to immediately inform a staff member if they see discarded needles, syringes or condoms, and that under no circumstances should they touch or pick up these items.

Nose wiping

Children in OSHC services are usually independent enough to blow their own noses. It is important that staff model and remind children that tissues should be used for blowing noses and disposed of in a bin. Staff should also encourage children to wash hands after wiping their noses.

Contact with blood and body fluids

Due to the risk of infection, it is important to avoid contact with blood and body fluids. However sometimes contact with this is unavoidable. Staff can be at risk of contact with blood and body fluids when administering first aid and cleaning up spills when a child or adult is sick or injured. All blood and body fluids should be treated as infectious and staff should follow recommendations from recognised health authorities if contact is made, and when cleaning up after a spill. This will assist the service in knowing when to use gloves, soap and water and disinfectant in dealing with body spills. For more information regarding cleaning up blood and body fluids visit the NHMRC website.

Immunisation

Immunisation is the most effective way to prevent some infections in children and adults. Services should develop a policy for excluding children who are not immunised should an outbreak of a vaccine-preventable infection occur. Services should ask families to provide a copy of their child's vaccination records. If a child is not vaccinated, services should tell the family that the child will be excluded if an outbreak occurs. Management should also encourage staff to keep their vaccination schedules up to date.

The service should have information readily available to staff and families about the immunisation schedules that are recommended by recognised health authorities. Immunisation Australia provides comprehensive information and recommended schedules for immunisation for both adults and children. This information is available in various languages from: www.immunise.health.gov.au.

Excluding children and staff with infectious diseases

The service should comply with Commonwealth and State legislation regarding the exclusion of children with an infectious disease or who have been exposed to an infectious disease. The best way to do this is through the development of a policy that details the service's exclusion criteria. The NHMRC provides a schedule of recommended minimum periods of exclusion from child care services for cases of, and contact with, infectious diseases. This schedule can be viewed at: <http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/fullhtml/exclusion.htm>

Should an infectious disease occur, information should be provided to families in a way that does not compromise the privacy of children, staff or families.

Further Information

- Department for Community Development, Government of Western Australia (2002) *Outside School Hours Care Licensing Manual* 1st Ed. Department for Community Development, Government of Western Australia: WA.
- Dougan, K. (2003) 'Infectious Diseases – what to look for'. *Putting Children First*. Issue 6. National Childcare Accreditation Council: NSW.
- Hughes, L., and Tansey, S. (2004) 'What is a Recognised Authority?'. *Putting Children First*. Issue 12. National Childcare Accreditation Council: NSW.
- National Childcare Accreditation Council. (2003) *Outside School Hours Care Quality Assurance Quality Practices Guide* (1st ed). National Childcare Accreditation Council: NSW.
- National Health and Medical Research Council. (2001) *Staying Healthy in Child Care 3rd Ed*. Commonwealth of Australia: ACT.
- Owens, A. (2003) 'Hand Washing and Nose Wiping'. *Childcare and Children's Health*, Vol 6, No 2. Centre for Community Child Health: Vic.
- Scott, S. (1998) 'Rubbish and Nappy Bins in Centres'. *Childcare and Children's Health*, Vol 1, No 2. Centre for Community Child Health: Vic.



For more information on OSHCQA please contact a NCAC Child Care Adviser.

Telephone: 1300 136 554 or (02) 8260 1900
E-mail: qualitycare@ncac.gov.au
Level 3, 418a Elizabeth St
Surry Hills NSW 2010

www.ncac.gov.au