

Good hygiene in child care services is essential for reducing the risk of cross infection between children and adults and helps children to develop hygiene habits that they will use throughout their lives. Families with children in child care should be able to see standards of hygiene used by child care professionals that minimise the spread of infection. Families can assist services to maintain a hygienic environment by following simple hygiene rules while they are at the service and by using good hygiene methods with their children at home.

Why is good hygiene important in child care?

Infection can be spread through direct physical contact between people, airborne droplets from coughing and sneezing or from contact with surfaces and objects. Children in child care come into contact with many other children and adults, and with toys, furniture, food and eating utensils. This high degree of physical contact with people and the environment creates a risk that children will be exposed to and spread infectious illnesses. While it is not possible for services to prevent the spread of all infections, they should be working to create a hygienic environment to minimise the spread of disease.

What hygiene methods should child care services be using?

Families should expect to see a range of hygiene methods being used by services that minimise cross infection. These will include procedures and specific practices that are carried out by child care professionals and children on a daily basis. Many of these should also be supported by written hygiene policies and procedures that are based on recommendations from recognised authorities such as the National Health and Medical Research Council, state and territory health departments and Food Standards Australia New Zealand.

Hygiene strategies that services should be using include:

- supporting adults to use thorough handwashing and drying
- encouraging children to follow simple rules of hygiene such as handwashing and basic dental care
- ensuring equipment and toys are regularly cleaned/washed and are well maintained
- keeping facilities such as bathrooms, kitchens, sleep and rest areas, and play areas clean
- using hygienic toileting and nappy change methods
- having hygienic procedures for wiping children's noses

- displaying clear written signs about the service's hygiene procedures such as handwashing, nappy changing and toileting
- implementing hygienic food handling, preparation and storage, and rubbish removal.
- providing written information for families about the service's hygiene practices and about recommended immunisation schedules for children
- developing clear procedures for handling and disposing of body fluids such as blood and any contaminated items such as used wound dressings
- excluding ill children from care
- encouraging families to keep unwell children at home.

How is children's hygiene encouraged?

Along with other hygiene methods, child care professionals can reduce the spread of infection by encouraging children to follow simple rules of hygiene. Children's self-help and self-care skills can also be promoted by supporting them to develop hygienic habits. Hygiene should be reinforced at the service through the children's program of experiences as well as daily routines such as mealtimes, nappy changing and toileting.

Child care professionals should be supporting children's hygiene by role modelling hygienic practices such as thorough handwashing and drying and using serving utensils to handle food. By setting hygiene rules with children and providing positive feedback and support, child care professionals can help children to develop personal hygiene skills.

What can families do to support service hygiene?

Families can greatly assist their child care service by following simple hygiene procedures when they are at the service and by using good hygiene at home with children. One of the best ways to

stop illness from spreading is through thorough handwashing and drying. By washing hands with their child upon arrival and departure from the service, families can minimise infections that are brought into and leave the service. Thorough handwashing and drying at home can also reinforce good hygiene habits with children and minimise cross infection.

Other helpful hygiene practices that families can do include:

- reminding your child about when they should wash their hands. For example, before eating, after toileting and after touching an animal.
- providing your child with a supply of spare clothes from home in case of toileting accidents and food and liquid spills
- keeping your child at home when they are ill until they are no longer contagious and are well enough to return to care.

Conclusion

While it is not possible for services to entirely prevent the spread of all infections, they should be working to create a hygienic environment by following procedures that are recommended by relevant health authorities. Families can support service hygiene by following simple hygiene rules at the service and at home with their children ■

Why is handwashing important?

Thorough handwashing and drying by adults and children is the single most effective method for reducing the risk of cross infection in child care services and in the home.

The following handwashing procedure is the one that is recommended by the National Health and Medical Research Council:

- wet hands with running water
- use liquid soap and spread over hands
- rub your hands vigorously as you wash them
- wash your hands all over
- pay particular attention to wash the palms and backs of hands, in between fingers, under finger nails and around wrists
- rinse your hands thoroughly to remove all suds and germs and to help prevent dermatitis
- turn off the tap using paper towel
- pat dry your hands with a new paper towel.

Encourage children not to touch the tap after they have washed and dried their hands as the tap will have germs on it.

For children with sensitive skin, sorbelene cream is suggested instead of liquid soap.

References and further reading

- Childcare and Children's Health. (2008). *An information sheet for parents. Hygiene and infection control*. Retrieved 27 February, 2009, from http://www.rch.org.au/ecconnections/publications/index.cfm?doc_id=11283
- National Health and Medical Research Council (2006). *Staying Healthy in Child Care. Preventing Infectious Diseases in Child Care* (4th edition). ACT: Commonwealth of Australia.
- Tansey, S. (2006). *Outside School Hours Care Quality Assurance Factsheet # 6: Infection Control in Outside School Hours Care*. NSW: NCAC.

Useful websites:

- Child and Youth Health: www.cyh.com
- Immunise Australia Program: www.immunise.health.gov.au
- National Health and Medical Research Council: www.nhmrc.gov.au
- Queensland Health Germ Busters Early Childhood Program: www.health.qld.gov.au/germbusters/resources_ec.asp
- Victorian Government Better Health Channel: www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au



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