Illnesses and Child Care

Young children typically get 5 to 10 illnesses every year. These illnesses are caused by a variety of germs and viruses. Children in group settings tend to have more illnesses because they share their germs with each other. Germs and viruses are spread from person-to-person by direct contact, through the air, or by contaminated objects. While there is no way to prevent all illnesses in child care settings, there are many things that parents and child care providers can do to reduce sickness.

Most child care programs are licensed to care only for well children. If a child is ill and comes to a group care setting, that child exposes the rest of the children and the staff. Child care providers do not have the time to provide the attention that an ill child needs.

Children who are ill should not be brought to child care. If a child becomes ill while in care, they should be isolated from the rest of the group and picked up immediately.

What the Child Care Should Do

- **Conduct daily health checks** – personally greet each child when they arrive for the day and check them for signs of illness.

- **Ask parents about symptoms** – if staff notice unusual symptoms or behavior with a child, call parents and ask about possible causes. Encourage open communication between classroom staff and parents.

- **Be firm and consistent about following the policy** – do not “give in” when parents hesitate to pick up a sick child and do not accept ill children into care.

- **Notify parents of infectious diseases** – if a child in your care has been diagnosed with an infectious disease, inform the parents of the other children who may have been exposed. The Child Care Health Outreach Program has sample parent letters/disease facts for most illnesses. Call the health department at 425.252.5415 or visit our website for guidance on illnesses and exclusions.

- **Get clear, written instructions from parents** – about giving medications to ill children. Keep consistent documentation on any medication given to a child. Understand that antibiotics are used to fight illnesses caused only by bacteria, not viruses.

- **Notify the Snohomish County Health Department** – if a child is diagnosed with a reportable disease. It is required that child care providers contact the Communicable Disease Program at 425.339.5303 for further information and guidance.

Child care providers and parents are welcome to call the Snohomish County Health Department’s Child Care Health Outreach Program with questions regarding disease and illness prevention in child care settings. 425.252.5415

Program staff are available to assist with writing exclusion policies and understanding licensing regulations.

Visit our website to find disease fact sheets, STARS class information, and many other child care health and safety materials.

www.snohd.org/childcare
Information for Parents

Parents need to take responsibility for the health of their children and the health of other children at the center. Review your child care’s health policy. Understand the exclusion guidelines the center will follow for your child and the other children in their care. Discuss with your child care provider steps that they will take to prevent the spread of germs in the environment—such as handwashing, cleaning, sanitizing, and proper diapering and toileting practices. Have open lines of communication with your child’s teachers. Make sure to tell them if you have any concerns about your child so they can be on the look out for signs of illness.

It is very important that parents keep ill children home. Take the time in advance to arrange for back-up care in the event your child becomes sick. When outbreaks occur, classrooms may need to be closed if the staff become ill.

- Be familiar with your employer’s policy on staying home if your child is sick
- Talk to family members, friends, or neighbors to see if they would be available to care for your child
- Have a back up plan if you are unable to leave work to pick up a sick child

If you take your child to the doctor, get a diagnosis from the health care provider in writing. Let the child care know what the diagnosis is. If your child needs any medications, make sure you get clear written instructions from the health care provider. Child cares have very strict policies on medication administration.

Take steps at home to help keep your child healthy. Such things as frequent handwashing, safe food preparation, serving healthy meals, drinking plenty of water, getting lots of exercise, and keeping up to date with immunizations and well-child visits to the doctor can go a long way in preventing illnesses.

If you have questions about dealing with sick children in child care settings, please contact the Child Care Health Outreach Program at Snohomish County Health Department at 425.252.5415.

Exclusion Guidelines

The following are general guidelines regarding how long to exclude ill children from group care. Remember that each child care program will have its own exclusion guidelines and illness policies. Parents need to be aware of and respect the policies of their child care program. Regardless of the symptom or illness, a child should stay home if he does not feel well enough to participate in normal activities, requires care that is greater than the staff can provide and/or poses a risk of spreading a harmful disease to others.

**Chickenpox**
- Until all blisters are crusted over (usually 5 to 6 days after the rash started) and no new lesions have appeared for 24 hours.

**Cold Sores**
- Exclude children who have sores with drooling that a child is unable to control or if the child is unable to participate due to mouth sores.

**Common Cold**
- No exclusion necessary. During times of illness outbreak, stricter rules may apply.

**COVID-19**
- Exclude per current CDC and local health department guidelines. Child care may ask for test results.

**Cytomegalovirus**
- No exclusion necessary.

**Diarrhea**
- Exclude until diarrhea has stopped for 24 hours.

**Ear Infection**
- No exclusion necessary.

**Fever**
- Exclude if temperature is 100.4°F or higher under the arm; return 24 hours after fever resolves without the use of fever reducing medications. *(see note below)*

**Fifth Disease**
- No exclusion for children who have normal immune systems and who don’t have an underlying blood disorder.

**Hand, Foot, & Mouth Disease**
- No exclusion necessary, unless the child is unable to participate normally.

**Head Lice**
- Exclude at the end of the day; allowed to return after treatment.

**Impetigo**
- Exclude until 24 hours after antibiotic treatment is started and sores can be covered.

**Infectious Mononucleosis**
- No exclusion necessary if child feels well enough to participate in activities, unless fever is present.

**Pinkeye (Bacterial)**
- No exclusion necessary, unless the child is unable to participate normally.

**Pinkeye (Viral)**
- No exclusion necessary; based on child care’s own policy.

**Pinworms**
- No exclusion necessary.

**Rashes**
- Exclude until it is determined the rash is not a symptom of an infectious disease.

**Ringworm**
- Exclude until treatment is started; keep area covered.

**Roseola**
- No exclusion necessary, unless fever is present or the child is unable to participate.

**Rotavirus diarrhea**
- Exclude until diarrhea has stopped for 24 hours.

**Scabies**
- Exclude until treatment is started.

**Sore Throat**
- Exclude until it is determined the sore throat is not a symptom of an infectious disease.

**Strep Throat**
- Exclude until 24 hours after antibiotic treatment is started and fever is gone.

**Vomiting**
- Exclude when there are 2 or more episodes in 24 hours; exclude until vomiting has resolved or until determined that the vomiting is not a symptom of an infectious disease.

**Yeast Infections**
- No exclusion necessary. *(see note below)*

* Infants 4 months and younger, should be evaluated by a medical professional. Infants younger than 2 months, should get medical attention immediately.