

Parent Aware Tip Sheets

Working with Child Care Health Consultants

Why is collaboration with health consultants important?

Adults working with young children are required to know a great deal about many topics – child development, curriculum and activities, guidance, family communication, etc. Caregivers cannot be experts on every topic that might impact children’s health and safety. Other professionals can provide the additional insight, consultation and technical assistance caregivers need to provide high quality care for young children.

Who should work with health consultants?

Licensed child care centers are required to have child care health consultants who are physicians, public health nurses or registered nurses (RNs). Most child care health consultants are RNs. Child care health consultants must review child care centers’ health policies and practices before initial licensure and repeat the review on an annual basis. For child care centers that serve infants, a child care health consultant must repeat the review on a monthly basis. Family child care providers are not required to use child care health consultants. However, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that all child care/early education programs, including family child care providers, use a child care health consultant.

What qualifications do health consultants have?

Child care health consultants are health professionals with expertise in issues related to young children. Child care health consultants often have a background as a pediatric or community health nurse, school nurse, pediatrician, pediatric nurse practitioner, or in similar health specializations.

While many health professionals may have at least some of the knowledge and skills required for child care health consultants, it is important to select and use a health consultant who has documented expertise in all of the following areas:

- Pediatric health care and early brain development
- Routines, conditions and constraints for caregivers
- Child care regulations
- Infectious diseases and immunizations
- Injury prevention for children and adults who care for children
- Preventive health care, including care for children with special needs
- Social and emotional development of children, including behavior and child guidance
- Nutrition
- Oral health
- Environmental health
- Emergency procedures
- Health and safety integration into the daily routines of a child care/early education program
- Community resources.

In addition to expertise in these important topical areas, child care health consultants must be knowledgeable and skilled in methods of observation and consultation, ways to work with diverse populations and communicate with non-health-related professionals, and techniques to teach health and safety content to caregivers.

What do health consultants do?

Child care providers/early educators use health consultants to help strengthen the overall health and safety of the program. The health consultant should visit the program regularly for the sole purpose of assessing and strengthening the health and safety practices of the program. The duties of the health consultant may vary from program to program based on needs. And, the health consultant's duties may change over time as the program or provider improves in some areas and requires attention in others. Health consultants are most effective when they individualize their support to the needs of each provider or program. Some of the duties health consultants typically perform include:

- Providing advice about health and safety issues.
- Assessing the program's policies and practices that contribute to a healthy environment for children such as hand washing, diapering or food preparation.
- Making suggestions for strengthening policies and practices to improve the health and safety of the program and the children.
- Reviewing health records of children and caregivers including immunizations, routine physicals, etc.
- Providing training and/or modeling of health practices such as hand washing, diapering, medication administration, temperature taking, etc.
- Providing consultation on practices required to care for children with special medical needs such as use of nebulizers.
- Providing expert advice about best actions to take in the event of an illness outbreak.
- Supporting the program or provider in offering health education to families.
- Linking caregivers to resources in the community that strengthen the health and safety of the program.

Health consultants typically meet with providers in their program on a regular basis choosing one or two items to focus on during each visit. The American Academy of Pediatrics suggests providers caring for toddlers have health consultant visits every two to three months and those caring for infants have at least monthly health consultant visits.

How can you find a health consultant?

It is important to select a highly qualified health consultant and to find a person who is able to work with caregivers over time to build a trusting relationship. The Healthy Child Care Consultant Network Support Center maintains a registry of child care health consultants. The registry is available online at <http://bit.ly/zPYNUt>

The Minnesota Child Care Resource and Referral Network offers the "Health and Safety Consultation in Child Care" video series. Completion of this training is a good indicator that a child care health consultant is qualified. The videos were developed with support from the National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care.