

Parent Aware Tip Sheets

Promoting Children's Wellness

Children must be physically well to enjoy and benefit from their child care/early education program. Parents expect that children will have some amount of childhood illness. They also expect that caregivers will do all they can to prevent illness and to respond to children's illnesses quickly and effectively.

What can you do to help to prevent illness?

Infectious illnesses are caused by living organisms such as bacteria or viruses. These organisms are frequently referred to as germs. Infectious illnesses are considered contagious or communicable when they can be spread from one person to another. Although germs can be found in almost any environment, there is a great deal caregivers can do to prevent children from contracting illnesses from germs in the child care/early education environment.

- **Hand washing.** Frequent and thorough hand washing is the most effective way to prevent illness. Children need frequent reminders, good modeling and supervision to ensure that they are washing their hands often enough and thoroughly enough to stop the spread of germs.
- **Cleaning and Sanitizing.** Removing germs from surfaces including tables, chairs, diaper changing areas, toilets and toys is essential to controlling the spread of germs in a child care/early education program. Cleaning removes dirt. Sanitizing kills bacteria, viruses and fungi with a solution of bleach and water. See the Tip Sheet on Cleaning and Sanitizing for more details on this important topic.
- **Immunizations.** Childhood immunizations are an effective way to prevent a number of potentially dangerous illnesses. Vaccines stimulate immunity and, for most children, are safe and effective. Child care/early educators providers are required to keep records of children's immunizations and to ensure that children's immunizations are up to date based on the schedule developed by the Center for Disease Control and the American Academy of Pediatrics. This schedule can be found online at <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/spec-grps/infants/downloads/parent-ver-sch-0-6yrs.pdf>

How can you best respond to illness?

Despite the best efforts of caregivers, children will become ill. Caregivers can prevent the spread of illness when it occurs by taking the following precautions:

- **Watch for signs and symptoms.** Early identification of a child's illness is important for two reasons. First, it allows parents to secure prompt medical treatment. Second, it prevents the child from spreading the illness to others. Caregivers should be alert to the following symptoms and communicable illness:
 - Temperature of 100° F axillary (under the arm) or 101°F orally
 - Vomiting
 - Diarrhea or abnormally loose stool more than twice in one day
 - Unexplained rash accompanied by fever, infection, pain or behavior change
 - Chicken pox (until lesions are crusted over)
 - Contagious pink eye or pus draining from the eye
 - Untreated, contagious lice, ringworm or scabies

- Significant respiratory distress (coughing, wheezing, etc.)
 - Bacterial infection that has not been treated with medication for 24 hours
 - Any illness that requires more care than a caregiver can provide without compromising the safety and supervision of other children.
- **Develop and enforce a policy excluding ill children from care.** Although many parents feel a great deal of pressure to avoid missing days of work, excluding ill children from care promotes overall wellness of the children and, in the long run, prevents children from missing days of care. Caregivers should notify parents in writing of the symptoms of illness that require excluding children from care. Conducting a quick and non-invasive health check when children arrive will help identify those who are not well enough to participate in the program.
 - **Maintain contact information for family members and emergency contacts.** Caregivers must notify the designated family member as soon as possible in the event a child becomes ill while at the program. Maintaining up-to-date contact information will make it easier to contact family members and to ensure that ill children spend as little time as possible near well children.
 - **Separate ill children from well children.** When a child begins to exhibit signs of illness it is important to separate the child from well children to minimize the spread of germs. Ill children must still be supervised and should be made as comfortable as possible while they wait for a family member to arrive. Consider making the child comfortable with a quiet activity on a cot in a low traffic area of the room that is still within sight of the rest of the group, if the child cannot be cared for out of the area.
 - **Increase cleaning and sanitizing efforts.** When a child becomes ill while at the program or when a family reports that a child has become ill and cannot attend, caregivers should increase their cleaning and sanitizing efforts. This is a good time to clean and sanitize items that are not frequently addressed such as rugs, toys that are not mouthed by children, dress-up clothes, shelves, door handles.
 - **Stay in contact with family members.** When a child is not attending the program due to illness it is still a good idea to stay in contact with the family. Caregivers can make an occasional phone call to check on the child's health. If the child is diagnosed with a communicable (contagious) illness such as measles, mumps, or E coli the Minnesota Department of Health and the families whose children attend the program must be notified. A complete list of illnesses that must be reported is available online at <http://www.revisor.mn.gov/rules/?id=4605.7040>

How should medications be handled?

Some child care/early education programs agree to administer medications to children as a service to families. Assuming the responsibility for administering children's medications is a very serious commitment. The following recommendations should guide the policies and practices used in administering medications in the child care/early education program:

- Written permission is required from the child's parent or guardian for all medications. Medications cannot be given unless permission has been given in advance.
- Over-the-counter (non-prescription) medication is only administered according to the manufacturer's (label) instructions unless a doctor's prescription has been written providing other instructions.
- Doctor's instructions are required and must be followed for all prescription medications. The pharmacy label with the child's name and the administration directions serves as the doctor's instructions.
- All medications should be brought to the program in the original container and labeled with the child's name.
- Parents should be notified in writing when medications are given. Most programs develop a log to record when medications are requested to be given and when they are given.
- All medications are stored in a location that is not accessible to children. Most programs store medication in a locked container.
- All medication must be current. Medications cannot be given if the expiration date has passed.

- Caregivers must wash their hands prior to administering medication.
- Caregivers must thoroughly read the medication label and understand the directions for administration. Caregivers should check the following facts: when is the medication to be given, how much should be given, should the medication be given with food, etc.?
- Caregivers should only use standard measuring spoons or medication spoons. Spoons used for food service are not standard measures and can result in grossly inaccurate dosages.
- Caregivers must verify the medication is only given to the child for whom it is prescribed. Avoid giving medication when the room is dark or allowing substitutes, volunteers or others who are unfamiliar with the children to give medication.
- Promptly return the medication to its inaccessible location immediately after it is given.
- The dosage given and the time the medication is given must be recorded in some kind of medication log.
- Stop giving the medication when the prescription has expired, even if medication remains in the bottle. Return unused or expired medications to the family.

Other medical treatments may need to be given while children are attending the program. For example, a child with asthma may need to use a nebulizer during the day in care. Caregivers must obtain appropriate training before attempting to give medical treatments. Such training can be arranged through a child care health consultant or the family's physician.