

How to Prevent the Spread of Illness

How Are Illnesses Spread?

Communicable diseases are spread from the source of infection to the exposed, vulnerable person (host). For this transmission to happen, three things are necessary.

1. Source of germs must be present.
2. Route or (ways) of transmission along which germs can be carried must be present.
3. A host or vulnerable person who is not immune to the germ must be present and come in contact with the germs.

What Can You Do to Keep the Children and Adults in Your Program Healthy?

Break the chain of transmission by breaking at least one of the three links. For best results, use more than one method of control in order to reduce the transmission of infectious disease.

You can control the spread of communicable disease in three ways:

At the source of infection or the “first link” by identification, treatment and, if necessary, isolation of the sick person. In the child care setting this is accomplished by doing a morning health check/ observation, and if necessary excluding ill children, referring them for medical care, and notifying health authorities when required.

At the route of transmission or the “second link” through personal hygiene practices; proper cleaning, sanitizing, and disinfecting of objects and surfaces; using proper diapering techniques; washing hands properly and at the right times; and by providing adequate ventilation.

By protecting the vulnerable person or the “third link” through immunization and healthy habits, for example: hand washing, good nutrition, exercise, and getting enough sleep.

Four Major Ways for the Spread of Illnesses or “Routes of Transmission”

1. Through direct contact with people or objects:

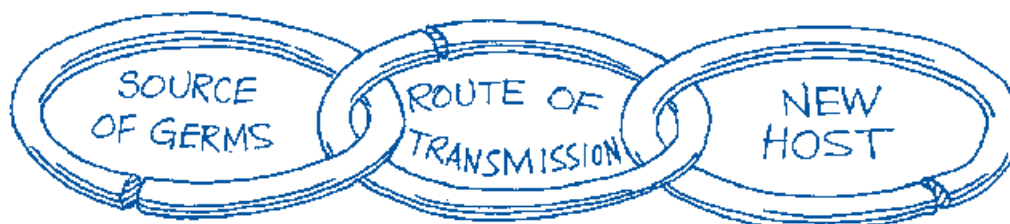
Infections can spread by direct contact with an infected area of someone’s body (for example, an open sore) or by contact with a surface that has infectious material on it. Bacteria, viruses, fungi, or parasites cause illnesses. Because young children are constantly touching their surroundings and the people around them, infections can spread easily among children and their caregivers in the child care setting.

2. Through the air or “respiratory transmission” (passing from the lungs, throat, or nose of one person to another person through the air):

Respiratory illnesses are spread through microscopic, contagious droplets of fluids from the nose, eyes, or throat. When an infected person talks, sings, coughs, sneezes, or blows their nose, infectious droplets get into the air where they can be breathed in by another person. Droplets can also land on hands or objects such as toys or food, and can be touched, mouthed, or eaten by other persons. When the germs in these infected droplets come in contact with the nose, eyes, or mouth of an uninfected person, they can multiply and cause illness. COVID-19 is an example of an illness that spreads mainly by respiratory transmission.

3. Through stool or “fecal-oral” transmission (transfer of a germ from an infected person’s stool into another person’s mouth):

Some diseases are spread through exposure to germs in the stool (feces, bowel movement) or by what is known as the fecal-oral route. This means that germs leave the body of the infected person in their stool and enter the body of another person through their mouth.



In most situations this happens when hands or objects that have become contaminated with a very small amount of stool (usually too small to be seen) are placed in the mouth. Or when food or water is contaminated with a very small amount of human or animal stool and then is eaten or drunk. Improperly prepared foods made from animals (for example, meat, milk, and eggs) can be the source of infection. Some infections, such as salmonella, may be spread through direct exposure to infected animals.

4. Through contact with blood and body fluids:

Some infections are spread when blood from a person with an infection gets into the bloodstream of an uninfected person. Hepatitis B and C, and HIV/AIDS are serious viral infections spread by contact with infected blood. Cytomegalovirus (CMV) is an example of a disease spread by urine or saliva. These viruses can be spread when blood or body fluids containing the virus enters the blood stream of another person. Spread can also occur when infected blood or body fluids come in contact with skin that has open sores, is damaged by conditions such as eczema, or with a broken surface of the mucous membranes (such as the inside lining of the mouth, eyes, nose, rectum or genitals). An infected mother can also transmit these infections to her newborn infant. Once these viruses enter a person's body, they may stay for months or years. This person may appear to be healthy but can still spread the viruses.

How to Reduce the Risk of Spreading Illnesses through Direct Contact

- Make sure staff and children wash their hands after contact with any body fluids.
 - Wear disposable gloves when touching body fluids (including feces) or objects and surfaces contaminated with body fluids.
 - Use running water for hand washing. Do not use basins or stoppered sinks, which can become contaminated with the germs.
 - Use plain liquid soap and single-use disposable paper towels or single-use cloth towels.
 - Wipe runny noses and eyes promptly, and wash hands afterwards.
 - Always use single-use disposable tissues for wiping noses. Never use the same tissue for more than one child.
 - Dispose of used tissues, wipes, and paper towels in a lined, covered, trash container with a foot pedal kept away from food and supplies.
- Follow recommended procedures for cleaning, sanitizing, and disinfecting toys and surfaces.
 - Follow recommended procedures for diapering.
 - Make sure that each child has their own crib or nap mat, sheets, pillow cases, and blankets.
 - Do not allow children to share personal items such as combs, brushes, blankets, pillows, hats, or clothing.
 - Store each child's dirty clothing separately in plastic bags and send it home for laundering.
 - Wash and cover sores, boils, blisters, cuts, or scrapes promptly and wipe away eye discharge.
 - Report rashes, sores, eye discharge, and severe itching to the family so they can contact their health care provider(s).
 - Don't allow pacifiers, food, or eating utensils to be shared.
 - Clean and sanitize mouthed toys.
 - Clean eating utensils carefully in soapy water; then rinse, sanitize, and air dry (known as the three sink method) or use a dishwasher to sanitize dishes and utensils.
 - Use single-use disposable cups, or reusable cups that are cleaned and sanitized after each use.

How to Reduce the Risk of Spreading Respiratory Illnesses

- Provide ventilation by safely opening windows.
- Spend more time outdoors.
- Maintain your heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) system. Change filters according to manufacturer's directions.
- Filter your indoor air using a portable filtration device.
- Teach children and staff to cough or sneeze into their elbow or sleeve. Or sneeze or cough into a tissue, and wash hands after throwing away the tissue.
- Ensure that staff and children wash their hands after wiping or blowing noses; after contact with any fluids from nose, throat, or eye; and before preparing or eating food.
- Don't kiss children on the lips; instead give children hugs.
- Wear a properly fitted face mask if recommended by local health authorities.

How to Reduce the Risk of Spreading Infections through the Fecal-Oral Route

Since children and staff who have digestive illnesses don't always feel sick or have diarrhea, the best method for preventing the spread of these diseases is to have standard precautions in place at your program. Many germs can survive on surfaces for periods ranging from hours to weeks.

PRACTICE THE FOLLOWING:

- Proper hand washing for adults and children.
- Environmental cleaning, sanitizing, and disinfecting with focus on diapering, toileting, food service and preparation areas, and mouthed toys.
- **Exclusion for diarrhea:** Excluded children and staff may come back after treatment and when the diarrhea improves such that stool doesn't leak from the diaper and/or there are no toileting accidents. With some diarrheal illnesses, approval of the child's health provider may be needed.

How to Reduce the Risk of Spreading Diseases through Contact with Blood and Body Fluids

Treat blood and other body fluids as if they were contagious. Wear protective gloves when handling blood, urine, and saliva.

Transmission of illnesses spread through blood is very rare in the child care setting, and illnesses such as HIV/AIDS are not spread by casual, daily contact with infected persons. However, HIV can be transmitted where there is blood contact. For example:

- Touching blood while giving first aid with hands or body surfaces that have cuts or open sores
- Collision accidents where the skin of both people is broken and blood is exchanged

- Cleaning up blood after an accident with hands that have cuts or open sores
- Biting. The only way blood-to-blood exchange can happen through biting is for the following events to occur:
 - There is an injury to the mouth of the biter.
 - The bite creates a wound so serious that the skin is broken and blood flows.
 - Blood is exchanged.
 - One of the children involved is infected with HIV.

STANDARD PRECAUTIONS:

The infection control practices listed below should be followed for all children, whether or not they are infected with blood borne illnesses.

- Proper hand washing
- Proper use of gloves
- Proper disposal of waste and contaminated materials such as gloves, paper towels, and bandages
- Proper cleaning, sanitizing, and disinfection.
- Proper care of soiled clothing
- Immunization for all children and staff against Hepatitis B
- Teaching all children not to touch any blood except their own

Considerations for COVID-19

Face masks are known to reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19. Children under two years old should not wear face masks because of risk of suffocation. Children two years and older should not wear masks when eating or napping.

Children and staff with symptoms of COVID-19 should stay home or provide a negative COVID-19 test. Check with your local public health department for further guidance.



EXAMPLES: How Some Childhood Infectious Diseases Are Spread

Transmission	How the disease is spread	Behaviors that spread	Examples of diseases	Possible symptoms
Air or Respiratory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Breathing germs in the air Contact with infected saliva and mucus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coughing or sneezing into the air Kissing on the mouth Sharing mouthed toys Wiping noses without thorough hand washing Poor ventilation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cold COVID-19 Flu Measles Tuberculosis (TB) Chickenpox 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coughing Fever Rash Runny nose Sore throat
Stool or Fecal-Oral	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mouth contact with items and hands contaminated by infected stool 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diapering and toileting or food preparation without thorough hand washing Sharing mouthed toys Unsafe food preparation Unsafe diapering procedures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Salmonella Shigella Giardia Pinworms Hand, foot and mouth disease Hepatitis A Polio <i>E. coli</i> <i>Noro virus</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stomach ache Nausea Vomiting Diarrhea
Direct Contact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contact with infected hair, skin and objects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Touching skin or hair which is infected Sharing clothing, hats and brushes which are infected 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Herpes Ringworm Scabies Head lice Impetigo Chickenpox 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rash Oozing sores Itching Visible nits or eggs
Contact with Blood and Bodily Fluids	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contact with infected blood and sometimes other body fluids 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sexual contact Changing bloody diapers without gloves Providing first aid without gloves Getting infected blood or body fluids into broken skin, eyes or mouth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> HIV/AIDS Hepatitis B & C Cytomegalovirus (CMV) Herpes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fatigue Weight loss Yellow skin Weakened immune system Sores Fever Swollen lymph nodes

Preventing the Spread of Infectious Disease

The Daily Health Check

California child care licensing regulations require daily health checks. Children with obvious symptoms of illness (including, but not limited to, fever or vomiting) are not to be accepted into care. Pay special attention to children who have been absent due to illness or have been recently exposed to a contagious disease.

Perform a health check for each child every day upon arrival and before the family leaves. The daily health check is not a formal medical exam. The routine is a more casual observation of the child as you welcome them to your program each day. You are checking for simple signs of illness that are easy to observe and report. The daily health check helps you understand what is normal for each child rather than diagnose an illness. While you may send a child home because of an illness observed during the daily health check, the overall goal is to know your children better and ensure they are feeling well enough to participate in your program.

In a child care setting where children may be arriving at the same time, it's challenging to take a moment with each child. However, this personal contact allows you to better understand each child, helps children feel comfortable, eases the transition to your program, reduces the spread of illness by excluding children with obvious signs of illness, and fosters better communication with families. It also helps to identify any health or developmental problems early.

Signs to Observe

When conducting a daily health check, you should watch for the following:

- General mood and changes in behavior (happy, sad, cranky, sluggish, sleepy, unusual behavior)
- Fever or elevated body temperature (if there is a change in child's behavior or appearance)
- Skin rashes, itchy skin, or itchy scalp, unusual spots, swelling or bruises
- Complaints of pain and not feeling well
- Other signs and symptoms of disease (for example, severe coughing, sneezing, breathing difficulties, discharge from nose, ears or eyes, diarrhea, vomiting)
- Reported illness in child or family members since last date of attendance

Use All Your Senses to Check for Signs of Illness

Listen to what the child and parents tell you about how the child is feeling. Is the child's voice hoarse, are they having trouble breathing, or are they coughing?

Look at the child from their level. Observe for signs of crankiness, pain, discomfort or being tired. Does the child look pale, have a rash or sores, a runny nose or eyes?

Feel the child for warmth or clamminess as a casual way of greeting. Is the child sweaty, do they have chills?

Smell the child for unusual odors. Is the child's breath fruity or does it smell bad? Do you notice any other foul smells?

Using Findings to Make Decisions

If you have concerns about how a particular child looks or feels, discuss them with the parent right then. Perhaps the parent needs to take the child home. If you decide that the child will remain, be sure to discuss how you will care for the child and at what point you will call the parent. It is your decision, not the parent's, whether the program will accept responsibility for the ill child. If the child stays all day, make sure you inform the parent about changes in the child's health status. Simple information about activity level, appetite, food intake, bowel movements and nap-time can be invaluable to the family.

Contrary to popular belief and practice, only a few illnesses require exclusion of sick children to ensure protection of other children and staff (see Exclusion for Illness Policy, page 1.72).

When your child care setting agrees to allow mildly ill children to attend, take these steps to better meet their needs, and be sure to follow California regulations:

- Maintain a small room or area where they can spend quiet time while being supervised.
- Assign one staff person to remain with these children when others go outside.



DAILY HEALTH CHECK



Signs to Observe:

- General mood and changes in behavior
- Fever or elevated body temperature
- Skin rashes, unusual spots, swelling or bruises
- Complaints of pain and not feeling well
- Signs/symptoms of disease (severe coughing, sneezing, breathing difficulties, discharge from nose, ears or eyes, diarrhea, vomiting etc.)
- Reported illness in child or family members

Use all of your senses . . .

- **LOOK** - for signs
- **LISTEN** - for complaints
- **FEEL** - for fever
- **SMELL** - for unusual odor

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