



Infections in child care centres

Children get infections whether or not they attend child care centres. However, children in child care centres tend to get more infections, and young children are the most likely to catch infections.

WHY DO CHILDREN IN CHILD CARE CENTRES GET MORE INFECTIONS?

Young children in child care centres are most likely to get infections because they have not developed the necessary protective immunities. There are other reasons why children in child care centres get more infections, especially colds and diarrhea, than children cared for in their homes. One reason is that children in group settings come in contact with many children, so they have a much greater chance of getting an infection from another child. Children also share toys and touch each other during play, and this spreads germs. Furthermore, many children have not yet learned how to use the toilet properly or the importance of handwashing. And finally, young children need a great deal of 'hands on' care.

It is especially difficult to prevent colds from spreading among children. Cold germs spread as follows:

- through the air (whenever children with colds cough or sneeze);
- through direct contact (whenever children with colds touch their saliva or runny noses and then touch other children); and
- through indirect contact (when children with colds touch their saliva or runny noses and then touch an object such as a toy or furniture; germs can live on an object for some time and can be picked up by an uninfected child who touches the object).

Diarrhea germs also spread easily, especially among children who are still in diapers. These germs are found in bowel movements and spread:

- when caregivers or children get the germs on their hands and then touch other children; and
- when caregivers or children eat food that has been prepared by someone whose hands had diarrhea germs on them.

WHAT CAN PARENTS DO?

Make sure that your child has received all of the recommended immunizations.

When you drop off your child at day care, talk to a caregiver about how the child is feeling. Report symptoms of a possible infection, and ask if your child should be ex-

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cluded from child care that day. For example, if you report that your child is feeling a bit under the weather, the caregiver will know to watch for signs of illness. If during the day the caregiver observes signs of infection, she or he will notify you. Prompt action, when an infection is first suspected, can often prevent its spread through the centre.

Check that the routines for washing hands and changing diapers are posted in the centre. Following these routines carefully can help prevent the spread of infections. These routines should also be followed at home and whenever parents change their child's diaper in the centre.

Make sure that soap and clean towels are always available at sinks.

Children with certain infections should stay at home so that parents can ensure that they receive appropriate care. This will also help prevent the infection from spreading to the other children in the child care program. Children should be kept at home if they have any of the following:

- an illness that prevents them from taking part in activities;
- an illness that requires more care than the staff can provide without affecting the health and safety of other children; and
- a very infectious illness (contact the child care staff or the local public health agency to get a list of the 'excludable' illnesses).

Notify a caregiver if you have to keep your child at home because of an infection. Appropriate action can then be taken by caregivers to help prevent the spread of infection among other children.

Plan ahead by making arrangements for the time when your child may become ill. Make sure that you know who will look after your child because there is a good chance that at some point your child will have to stay home.

This information should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your physician. There may be variations in treatment that your physician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.

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