

Preventing the Spread of Influenza (Flu) in Child Care Centres



Influenza Symptoms

Influenza (flu) is a respiratory illness that includes fever, headache, extreme tiredness, dry cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, and muscle aches. Nausea, vomiting and diarrhea may also be seen in children but are less likely in adults.

How Influenza Spreads

Influenza is mainly spread from person to person through coughing and sneezing. An infected person coughing and sneezing releases moist droplets into the air carrying the influenza virus. The droplets travel through the air reaching the mouth and nose of people nearby. A person can also pick up the virus by touching contaminated surfaces, nasal discharge or saliva from an infected person and then touching one's own nose/mouth or someone else's nose/mouth before performing hand hygiene (hand wash or hand sanitize).

Vaccination

Vaccination against influenza before the flu season each year is the best way to prevent this disease. In child care, vaccination along with other infection control measures can help to prevent the spread of influenza among children and staff. The National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) recommends healthy children 6 to 23 months of age receive the influenza vaccine as well as individuals providing child care to children younger than 24 months. Further, the NACI encourages healthy individuals age 2 to 64 years receive the influenza vaccine.

Helpful Hints

- Encourage influenza vaccination of staff (including part-time/volunteers) and children
- Teach and encourage staff and children to wash their hands for 15-20 seconds using the proper handwashing technique
- Ensure designated handwashing sinks are stocked with liquid soap and paper towels at all times
- Encourage staff and children to use a hand sanitizer when hands are **not** visibly soiled and when handwashing facilities are **not** easily accessible
- Use a sufficient amount of hand sanitizer to cover all surfaces of hands and rub hands together until dry (follow manufacturer's instructions)
- Supervise the use of hand sanitizers by children
- Note: Children with sensitive skin may not be able to use hand sanitizers
- Encourage staff to wash the hands of infants and toddlers frequently (hand sanitizers are **not** recommended for this age group)
- Remind children and staff to use a tissue to cover their nose and mouth when sneezing or coughing and discard tissue immediately after use, then practice hand hygiene
- Note: Single-use tissues should always be readily available in each room
- If tissues are not available, staff and children are encouraged to sneeze or cough into their elbow
- Clean and disinfect surfaces, toys, and commonly shared items as per Durham Region Health Department's Cleaning and Disinfecting Schedule
- Use an appropriate disinfectant (e.g. approved or has a DIN #) for disinfection of equipment and surfaces (follow the manufacturer's instructions)
- Label and store disinfectants and hand sanitizers out of reach of children at all times
- Observe children for symptoms of respiratory illness, particularly when influenza is reported to be circulating in the community
- Encourage parents of ill children to keep their children at home
- Encourage ill staff to stay at home
- Contact the local health department when there is an increase in respiratory illnesses occurring in the child care centre above the baseline level (more than normal)

Note: Wash hands after using the washroom or diapering, before and after eating, after contact with blood or body fluids, after playing outside and, when hands are visibly soiled (hand sanitizers are not recommended for use in these instances).

For further information, please contact the Durham Region Health Department, Environmental Help Line at 1-888-777-9613.



Environmental Help Line
905-723-3818 or 1-888-777-9613
durham.ca