



Infection prevention and control

Early Years Alliance mini-guide



How you manage infection and ensure it is controlled in your early education setting is an important part of protecting children's health.

Infection prevention and control is concerned with the hygiene practices and precautions that all educators in early years settings must take to prevent the spread of germs and control the spread of infection.

The EYFS (2023) states that providers: 'must promote the good health of children attending the setting. They must have a procedure, discussed with parents and/or carers, for responding to children who are ill or infectious, take necessary steps to prevent the spread of infection, and take appropriate action if children are ill'.

There are many opportunities for germs to spread in an early years environment where there are children in close proximity with each other sharing multiple resources. Babies and young children have a relatively low state of immunity as they have not previously been exposed to specific germs. When they start attending an early years setting they are exposed to an increased number of childhood infections and other infectious illnesses.



It is not unusual for children to attend more than one setting, or to have older siblings who attend school. Therefore, the number of germs they come into contact with increases and infections are more easily spread.

Effective hygiene practices

One of the most effective ways to prevent and control infections is to ensure that efficient hygiene practices are embedded in the setting's practices, for example, good hand hygiene. Keeping hands clean is one of the best ways to stay free from infection and reduces the risk of germs and illnesses spreading. All staff should know good techniques for handwashing and be able to demonstrate this to the children. Handwashing posters near sinks for staff and children will help support this.

Other important hygiene practices include:

- encouraging children to cover their mouths when they cough or sneeze and wipe their noses, if they are able to, throw tissues away immediately after use and then wash their hands
- cover any wounds or lesions and avoid certain tasks, for instance, preparing and serving food, play dough, clay, gloop and sand or water play
- use appropriate, single-use personal protective equipment (PPE), for example, wear aprons and gloves when carrying out tasks such as soiled nappy changing, or cleaning up vomit or blood.



Cleaning schedules

A regular cleaning schedule is vital in preventing the spread of infection as germs cannot thrive on clean, dry surfaces. This should be increased during any infection outbreak which may also call for a deep clean including carpets and curtains. During cleaning, any damaged items should be replaced as soon as possible to ensure germs do not build up on scratched, or broken surfaces.

Outbreaks and exclusion

Where infections do occur, parents generally understand that if their child is poorly, they need to be kept at home. If there are any concerns they should seek advice from a GP. Depending on the infection, their child may also need to adhere to a strict exclusion period. Only a medical practitioner can diagnose an unwell child. However, early years educators should be able to provide information about recommended exclusion times for a confirmed diagnosis and must always be prepared to send a child home if they believe that they may still be infectious.

For further information on exclusion periods, visit:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-protection-in-schools-and-other-childcare-facilities

An outbreak at the setting is when there are two or more cases of an infection in children or staff occurring at around the same time or when there is a greater than expected rate of infection than might usually be seen.

Where you believe there to be an outbreak at your setting, you should contact your local health protection team for further advice at: www.gov.uk/health-protection-team. You should also contact them as soon as possible to report any serious or unusual illness, particularly:

- *Escherichia coli* (VTEC) (also called E.coli 0157) or E coli VTEC infection
- food poisoning
- hepatitis
- measles, mumps, rubella (rubella is also called German measles)
- meningitis
- tuberculosis
- typhoid
- whooping cough (also called pertussis)

Notifiable diseases

Medical practitioners have a legal responsibility to diagnose and report particular diseases, such as the ones listed above, to government authorities so that appropriate action can be taken to minimise their spread and impact. If a child who attends your setting is diagnosed with a notifiable disease you should contact your local HealthProtection Team for advice.

Covid-19 remains on the list of diseases notifiable to local authority proper officers under the Health Protection (Notification) Regulations 2010- however, you no longer need to tell Ofsted if there is a confirmed case of Covid-19 at your setting.

Vulnerable staff/children

All staff should be knowledgeable about the setting's infection control procedures. They should also be aware of any children or staff at the setting who might be vulnerable to infection and the particular risk factors for them. For example, some individuals may have a medical condition which makes them more vulnerable to infections. Some infections can also pose a risk to pregnant staff. Children who have not been vaccinated could also be classed as vulnerable and their parents should be advised to be extra vigilant for signs of illness and not to bring their child to the setting if any are observed.

Where you are providing care for vulnerable children as well as being rigorous about exclusion times you should also make the parents aware of any outbreaks immediately, especially if the child is known to have a weakened immune system.

Further information

Good Practice in Early Years Infection Control (Early Years Alliance, 2009)



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