



Preventing the Spread of Influenza in Child Care Centres

What is influenza?

Influenza, commonly called 'the flu', is a respiratory illness caused by the influenza virus. Influenza in young children can lead to serious complications such as pneumonia. In Canada, the flu season usually is from November to April.

What are the symptoms of influenza?

Influenza symptoms include chills, fever, headache, extreme tiredness, runny eyes, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, ear infections and muscle aches. Nausea, vomiting and diarrhea may also be seen in children.

How is influenza spread?

Influenza is spread mainly from person to person through coughing and sneezing. A person can also pick up the virus by touching respiratory droplets on another person or object and then touches their own nose or mouth before washing their hands.

What can be done to prevent influenza?

Vaccination against influenza before the flu season starts each year is the best way to prevent this disease. In child care centres, vaccination along with other infection prevention and control measures can help to prevent the spread of influenza among children and staff. The National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) recommends all children 6 to 59 months of age receive the influenza vaccine as well as individuals providing care to children younger than 5 years of age. Further, influenza vaccine is recommended and available free of charge in Ontario for all people ages 6 months of age and older.

Helpful Hints for Child Care Centres

- Encourage yearly vaccination of staff (including part time/volunteers) and children.
- Teach and encourage staff and children to wash their hands for at least 15 seconds using the proper handwashing technique.
- Ensure designated handwashing sinks are supplied with liquid soap and paper towels at all times.
- Encourage staff and children to use an alcohol based hand sanitizer when hands are not visibly soiled and when handwashing facilities are not easily accessible.
- Encourage staff and children to cough and sneeze into their sleeve/elbow, followed by good handwashing. Alternatively, staff and children can cover their nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing and discard the tissue immediately after use.
- Frequently clean and disinfect surfaces, toys, and commonly shared items.
- Use an appropriate and approved disinfectant for disinfection of equipment and surfaces.
- Observe children for symptoms of respiratory illness, particularly when influenza is reported to be circulating in the community.
- Ensure a policy is in place promoting to parents the importance of keeping their children out of the child care centre when they are ill and to follow up with a physician for a diagnosis.
- Encourage staff to stay at home if they are ill
- Contact the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit when there is an increase in respiratory illnesses, above the baseline level, occurring in the child care centre.

For more information call the Communicable Disease Team at ext. 8809.



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