

Volunteer Leader Training Guide

AAAA-CHOO! Managing and Preventing Illness

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Target Audience

- EHC leaders
- Parents
- Grandparents

Objectives

- To share with participants the ways contagious diseases are spread.
- To share with participants ways to prevent illness, especially in young children.

Introduction

We all share the responsibility for keeping children healthy and preventing the spread of contagious illnesses and diseases.

Young children, especially those under the age of two, are more likely to get sick because their immune systems are not fully developed and they have no experience with many of the germs that cause infection. It's essential that we all do what we can to prevent illness and to manage it when it does occur, especially with young children.

Do your grandchildren visit you at your home? Do you go and visit your children and/or grandchildren at their home? Do you invite neighborhood children into your home? Do you ever have guests over who have young children? If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, it's important for you to understand how you can manage and prevent the spread of illnesses and diseases.

Infectious diseases are illnesses caused by infection with viruses or bacteria or by fungi or parasites. Contagious or communicable diseases are infectious diseases that can spread from one person to another. Much can be done to reduce the risk of transmission of infectious diseases. Occasionally, outbreaks of serious diseases may occur. If preventive measures are not taken, these serious diseases can spread very quickly.

Let's examine how germs are spread. The germs that cause infections and contagious diseases are spread in four main ways. We will discuss each of these in detail, and you'll learn ways to prevent the spread of germs for each.

Diseases Spread Through the Respiratory Tract

Respiratory tract diseases spread through tiny infectious droplets of the nose, eye or throat. Most droplets are spread through hand contact, but some germs are spread by airborne droplets from infected people's sneezes and coughs. These droplets infect a healthy person through contact with mucus membranes of the eyes, nose and mouth.

Think about the number of times we touch our mouths, noses and eyes throughout the day, usually without washing our hands first. Each time this happens, we are picking up germs from surfaces our hands have touched. Respiratory tract diseases range from very mild (viral colds and strep throat) to life threatening (bacterial meningitis). The common cold affects people of all ages, but infants and toddlers can have up to six to eight of these viral infections each year.

Young children are more susceptible to infection because they have little experience with infectious agents in the environment and because they are less likely than adults to wash their hands before and after touching their nose, eyes or mouth. Young children often have physical contact with objects around them that have been touched by others.

Following these steps can help you reduce the spread of respiratory tract diseases:

- Handwashing and cleanliness are crucial to stop the spread of all respiratory diseases.
- Do not allow any food to be shared.
- Wash and sanitize any mouthed toys and frequently used surfaces.
- Wash eating utensils carefully in hot, soapy water, then sanitize and air dry.
- Always use a dishwasher when possible.
- Since coughs and sneezes come too quickly to always use a tissue, teach children and adults to cough or sneeze toward the floor or to their shoulder. If someone coughs or sneezes into a tissue or hand, properly dispose of the tissue and wash hands.
- Wipe runny noses and eyes promptly, and wash hands afterwards.
- Use disposable towels and tissues.
- Discard towels and tissues contaminated with nose, throat or eye liquids in a step can with a plastic liner. Keep trash cans away from food and classroom materials. Teach children to drop tissues into the trash cans and not to play in the trash cans.

Diseases Spread Through the Intestinal Tract

These diseases are caused by viruses, bacteria or parasites that multiply in the intestines and pass out of the body in the stool. If you are around infants or toddlers in diapers, you are at a greater risk of spreading disease through the intestinal tract. Adults and children frequently get feces on their hands when in the process of changing diapers. When infectious stool gets on hands or objects, people who fail to wash before touching their mouths or food swallow the germs.

Children or adults with disease-causing germs in their stool may not act or feel sick or have diarrhea. Laboratory tests are the only way to tell if a particular stool contains these germs. Since children and adults who have intestinal tract diseases don't always feel sick or have diarrhea, the best method of prevention is to always practice preventing the spread of illness. Make sure you are taking these precautions:

- Insist on frequent, thorough handwashing for both adults and children.
- General cleanliness and sanitizing is a must.

Diseases Spread by Direct Contact

Superficial infections and skin infections like impetigo, ringworm, conjunctivitis, scabies and head lice are caused by superficial bacterial or viral infections or parasitic infestation. They are common and are not serious. They are spread by direct contact with infected secretions. Young children are constantly touching their surroundings and other adults, so these infections can spread easily among children and adults.

How to Stop the Spread of Superficial/Skin Infections

1. Follow these handwashing and cleanliness guidelines:
 - Make sure everyone washes their hands thoroughly after contact with any possible infectious material.
 - Use free-flowing clean water for handwashing.
 - Use liquid soap.
 - Always use disposable tissues or towels for wiping and washing.
 - Never use the same tissue or towel for more than one child.
 - Dispose of used tissues and paper towels in a lined, covered step can away from food and other materials.
 - Wash and sanitize toys and all other surfaces/objects.
2. Do not allow children to share personal belongings such as combs, brushes, blankets, pillow, hats or clothing.
3. Promptly wash and cover sores, cuts and scrapes.
4. Report rashes, sores, running eyes and severe itching to the family so they can visit with their child's pediatrician.

Infectious Diseases Spread Through Blood

Hepatitis B and HIV/AIDS are two serious viral infections that can be spread when infected blood comes in contact with a broken surface or a mucus membrane. This can occur when the skin is punctured by a contaminated needle. An infected mother can pass the virus to her newborn infant during pregnancy or childbirth or by breastfeeding. Once these viruses enter a body, they may stay for months or years. An infected person may appear to be healthy but can spread the virus.

How can you help stop the spread of infectious diseases transmitted through contact with blood? The diseases spread through blood contact, so it is more difficult to catch or spread to another person. But, you should treat all blood and body fluids as if they are contagious, because you never know if you may be dealing with an infected person. Wear disposable latex or vinyl gloves whenever contact with blood occurs, for example, during first aid and for clean up. You must immediately clean up any blood spills with detergent and water then sanitize every blood-contaminated surface with the bleach solution or other approved sanitizing solution. Thoroughly wash hands and any exposed skin with soap and water.

You have already heard in this lesson the importance of proper handwashing, but let's go into more detail. It is really amazing to stop and think about the number of people who don't wash their hands at all. Just think about your last trip to a public restroom. Did everyone leaving that restroom wash their hands properly?

Handwashing is the single best defense against the spread of infectious disease. Numerous studies show that unwashed or improperly washed hands are the primary carriers of infections. When you wash and how often you wash are more important than what you wash with. There are five important handwashing components:

- Use running water that drains- not a stopped sink or container. A common container of water will spread germs!
- Use liquid soap for children and adults.
- Rub your hands together for at least 20 seconds with warm water. Friction helps remove the soil that holds germs. Rinse hands, fingertips down from wrists to nails, under running water until all soil and soap are gone.
- Turn off the water faucet with a paper towel. Why is this important? Because dirty hands turned the faucet on. Consider a faucet to be dirty at all times. If you have to open the bathroom door, use your paper towel, and then throw it away. Don't contaminate clean hands. Throw the paper towel away into a lined, covered trash container with a foot pedal.
- Have hand lotion available for adults to apply. Lotion prevents dry or cracked skin. Dry skin can trap germs, so using lotion is not only for comfort but also to help prevent the spread of germs.

Knowing when to wash hands is important too. Obviously, you should wash hands whenever they are dirty. In particular, children and adults should always wash hands before eating, after using the toilet, after being outdoors, after playing with pets and after coughing, sneezing or blowing nose. In addition, adults need to wash their hands upon arrival for the day, when moving from one child group to another, before feeding a child, before and after diapering a child, before giving medication, before preparing or serving food, after caring for a sick child, after cleaning up spills and after other cleaning activities.

Proper Handwashing Handout: This handout provides you with the details on how to properly wash your hands. Make sure children you know actually practice good handwashing techniques. Handwashing can greatly reduce the number of illnesses in families. We know that handwashing is the single best defense against the spread of illness.

Infectious diseases are common in groups of young children, but usually they are not serious. Infectious diseases are also very common in large families. Children inevitably catch colds and flu. If you come in frequent contact with children, you are more likely to become ill.

Planning must take place in advance to prevent disease from spreading in your home. We all know that it will still occur at times. But, making sure you have a plan to manage illnesses that occur in your home is the first step to preventing them.

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