

Outbreaks: Information for Childcare Providers

Germs can spread rapidly in group settings such as a childcare centre. Prevention, timely detection and management of outbreaks are key to reducing the impact of the illness in these settings.

What is it?

An outbreak may be occurring when you have a greater than usual number of persons ill with the same symptoms (ie. fever, diarrhea, vomiting, cough, rash) in a specific period of time.

Gastroenteritis outbreaks

Symptoms of infectious gastroenteritis include vomiting and/or diarrhea. It is also known as the “stomach flu”. Stomach flu can be caused by several different viruses, including rotaviruses and noroviruses, bacteria or parasites.

A gastroenteritis outbreak exists when you have three or more cases of infectious gastroenteritis within a one to four day period.

To be considered a case one of the following must be met:

- Two or more unexplained episodes of diarrhea or vomiting within a 24 hour period.
- One episode of diarrhea and one episode of vomiting within a 24 hour period, not explained by another cause.

Respiratory outbreaks

Symptoms of respiratory illness may include fever, headache, cough, sore throat, runny nose, sore muscles or tiredness. Children can have as many as 8 to 10 colds a year. Illness is typically mild and often caused by a virus.

Since children are exposed to many viral illnesses circulating in the community and within families, increased respiratory illness at a child care centre does not necessarily result in an outbreak being declared. However, infection prevention and control measures should be put in place to limit the spread of illness at the centre.

Please call the health unit if there are a large number of children/staff affected with respiratory symptoms, they are experiencing severe illness (i.e. hospitalizations) or unusual symptoms.

Some diseases (eg. Measles) should be treated like an outbreak even if there is only one case. Please call the health unit to report any cases of a reportable disease as indicated on the Reportable Diseases List.

What is the childcare centre required to do?

Report suspected outbreaks to the Communicable Disease Control Program (CDC) at 705-474-1400 or 1-800-563-2808, ext 2229.

Start to fill out a separate line listing for ill children and staff.

What questions should we expect to be asked?

- When did the children become ill?
- What symptoms are the ill children experiencing?
- When did the ill children last attend the centre?
- Are there any staff members with similar illness?
- What is the total population of children and staff and how are they distributed in the facility?
- Have there been any special events at the child care centre or field trips?
- Have the children had any contact with animals?

What will happen next?

Recommendations will be provided by the health unit to help limit the spread of the illness. An outbreak may be declared.

References:

Gregg, M.B. (2008). *Field Epidemiology*. Oxford University Press: New York, New York.

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Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, Public Health Branch. Infectious Diseases Protocol. (2015b). *Appendix B: Gastroenteritis, institutional outbreaks*. Retrieved from: http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/oph_standards/docs/gastro_outbreaks_cd.pdf.

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