

Guide for Outbreak Prevention & Control in Child Care Facilities

Includes viral respiratory, gastrointestinal, rash & other illnesses



If you have feedback about this guide email

CDCResourceFeedback@primarycarealberta.ca

If you have questions about a specific outbreak, or facility-specific processes, always direct your questions to your child care operator or the AHS Public Health Outbreak Team.

Navigating this resource

- The most up-to-date version of the guide is the electronic version on the website. Printed copies of the guide should be considered current only on the date printed.

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Land acknowledgement

Our work takes place on historical and contemporary Indigenous lands, including the territories of Treaty 6, Treaty 7 & Treaty 8 and the homeland of the Métis Nation within Alberta and 8 Metis Settlements. We also acknowledge the many Indigenous communities that have been forged in urban centres across Alberta.

Introduction

Child care operators are responsible to protect the health of children under their care and staff working in their facilities. Child care facilities are required to report outbreaks¹ and communicable diseases² under Section 26 of the Alberta [Public Health Act](#).

The Alberta Health Services (AHS) Public Health Outbreak team (including provincial and zone Medical Officers of Health, Communicable Disease Control Nurses and Safe Healthy Environments Public Health Inspectors) collaborate with child care facilities to manage outbreaks of viral respiratory, gastrointestinal (GI), rash and other illnesses.

This guide provides best practice recommendations for outbreak prevention and control in licensed facility-based child care programs such as day care, preschool and out of school care to reduce the risk of spreading illness.³ It was developed by AHS Communicable Disease Control and Safe Healthy Environments.

Licensed child care facilities must comply with applicable zoning and health and safety legislation. This includes the [Early Learning and Child Care Act](#) and the [Early Learning and Child Care Regulation](#).

- The term facility is used throughout the guide when referring to the roles and responsibilities of operators and staff in licensed child care facilities.

Although this guide is intended for facility-based settings, home-based child care programs such as family day homes may use it as a resource.

- Home-based providers are not required to report illnesses or suspected outbreaks to AHS but may consult with [AHS Population Public Health Support team \(PPHST\)](#).

Child care outbreak checklist

The [Child Care Outbreak Checklist](#) summarizes the key outbreak actions in a checklist format.

¹ An outbreak occurs when there are more cases of a communicable disease than are normally expected in a specific time and place.

² A communicable disease is an illness caused by an organism or micro-organism or its toxic products that is transmitted directly or indirectly from a person with infection, an animal or the environment.

³ Illness refers to symptoms of viral respiratory, gastrointestinal or rash illness.

Always use outbreak prevention practices

Germs can spread from person to person or via contaminated surfaces. Use the following outbreak prevention practices every day to stop the spread of illness.

Child care operators are encouraged to develop their own facility-specific plans. This includes a facility illness plan that provides details for how staff manage ill children.



Perform frequent hand hygiene

Hand hygiene is the most effective way to prevent the spread of illness.

- Encourage washing hands with soap frequently. This is the preferred method for hand hygiene.
- Wash hands with plain soap and water:
 - When hands are visibly soiled with food, dirt, or blood and body fluids
 - Before, during, and after handling food
 - Immediately after using the washroom
 - After diapering activities
 - After cleaning tasks.
- Also provide access to alcohol-based hand rub for adults.
 - Older children may use alcohol-based hand rub with supervision by staff.
 - Alcohol-based hand rub is not permitted for infants and toddlers.



Perform respiratory etiquette

- Promote respiratory etiquette (Cover Your Cough).
- Support those who choose to wear a mask.



Promote immunization to prevent serious illness

- Encourage staff, families and children to get recommended vaccines, including COVID-19 and influenza.



Provide a healthy, clean environment

- Follow the Public Health Recommendations for Environmental Cleaning and Disinfection of Public Facilities.
- Ensure frequent cleaning and disinfection of high-touch surfaces such

as doorknobs, light switches, tabletops and washrooms.

- Improve ventilation in the facility. For example, open windows to improve airflow when weather permits and maintain HVAC systems.



Follow safe food handling practices

- Refer to information on food handling from [AHS Health and Safety Guide for Operators of Child Care Facilities](#).

Handle food with care

- Encourage staff and children to perform hand hygiene prior to handling food or eating.
- Minimize handling of shared food and serving utensils.
- Provide children with individual plates, cups and utensils and discourage sharing of items.

Keep kitchen and dining areas clean.

- Clean and disinfect all surfaces of tables and chairs after each meal. Include the underneath edge of the chair seat and table.



Keep the facility illness-free

Stay home when ill

- Remind parents/guardians to keep children home if they have new viral respiratory or GI illness symptoms⁴.
- Remind staff not to work when ill.

Monitor for illness

- Request staff watch children for **new** symptoms of illness and follow the facility illness plan if new symptoms are identified.
 - Send staff who are ill home as soon as possible.
 - Keep children away from others if they are ill at the facility.
 - Contact parents/guardians to pick up children who are ill as soon as possible.

Care for children who develop viral respiratory illness

- Clean hands well and often.

⁴ Children with symptoms due to pre-existing conditions may attend child care in most cases. Discuss symptoms with parents/guardians to determine if there may be an alternative cause for the symptoms such as allergies or asthma. Parents in conjunction with a healthcare provider determine if a child's symptoms are related to a pre-existing condition.

- Limit exposure to respiratory secretions.
 - Wear a mask.
 - Ask children to cover cough and sneezes with a sleeve or tissue.
 - Offer a mask to children over two years of age, if tolerated.

Care for children who develop GI illness

- Clean hands well and often.
- Promptly and thoroughly clean and disinfect areas soiled by vomit or feces.
- Have staff wear gloves and gown/protective clothing while caring for a child with GI illness. Consider using mask and face shield to protect from splashes.
 - Wash hands before and after wearing gloves.



Inform parents/guardians and staff when it is safe to return after illness

Viral respiratory illness

Stay home until:

- All symptoms have improved⁵ **and**
- Feeling well enough to resume normal activities **and**
- Fever-free for 24 hours without using fever-reducing medications.

Consider wearing a mask for five days when indoors with others once feeling well enough to resume normal activities.

- Masks are not recommended for children under two years of age.

Refer to [Respiratory illness](#) and [COVID-19 information for Albertans](#).

GI illness

Stay home until 48 hours after the last episode of vomiting and/or diarrhea.

Rash /other illnesses

Stay home for the length of time recommended by a physician, nurse practitioner or the AHS Public Health Outbreak team.

⁵ Improved means the child or staff feel better than on the previous days.

Watch for and report symptoms



Report illness to the AHS Provincial Public Health Support team (PPHST) at **1-844-343-0971**. Use this table to identify symptoms to report to PPHST.⁶

Illness type	Watch for new onset of these symptoms ⁷	When to report
Viral respiratory illness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cough Shortness of breath Sore throat Loss or altered sense of taste/smell Runny nose or nasal congestion Fever Fatigue (significant and unusual) Muscle ache or joint pain Headache Nausea or diarrhea 	Within a seven-day period: Report two or more children (from different households) with new onset of two or more symptoms.
GI illness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two or more episodes of diarrhea in a 24-hour period or Two or more episodes of vomiting in a 24-hour period or One or more episode each of vomiting and diarrhea in a 24-hour period or One episode of bloody diarrhea or Laboratory confirmation of a pathogen known to cause GI illness. 	Children: Report two or more children with GI illness within a 48 hour period. Staff: Report if there is an unusual increase in GI illness (above the baseline) even if staff were not present at work with symptoms. Note: Report one episode of bloody diarrhea in a child or staff.
Illness type	When to report	
Rash illness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Report three or more children with a similar rash illness within a 10-day period. 	
Other illness 	Some illnesses may benefit from further advice and/or investigation. Report any other illnesses of concern such as measles, mumps, pertussis (whooping cough), meningitis, hepatitis and group A streptococcal infections.	

⁶ This table summarizes when to report illness to PPHST, a provincial outbreak reporting and response team who provide initial support and direction to child care facilities reporting possible outbreaks. It does not replace the facility illness plan.

⁷ Symptoms due to a preexisting condition do not need to be reported to PPHST.

After the child care facility has reported to PPHST

PPHST will notify the AHS Public Health Outbreak team

- After the report is made, PPHST will:
 - Send a summary of the information reported to the AHS Public Health Outbreak team
 - Advise the facility when to expect a response from the AHS Public Health Outbreak team.

Communication from the AHS Public Health Outbreak team to the facility

The AHS Public Health Outbreak team will phone the facility to gather more information and determine if an outbreak will be opened.

If an outbreak is opened, the AHS Public Health Outbreak team will:

- Provide instructions for reporting additional ill children and staff.
- Direct the facility to continue with routine outbreak prevention practices and to start implementing control measures to use for every outbreak.
- Advise how to contact the AHS Public Health Outbreak team during the outbreak.

For viral respiratory and rash illness outbreaks:



Call 1-833-592-2029

or



Email CD_Outbreak_School_DayCare@albertahealthservices.ca

For GI illness outbreaks:

- Use the contact information provided by the AHS Public Health Outbreak team.

Control measures to use for every outbreak

Communicate about the outbreak

- Inform parents/guardians, staff and visitors about the outbreak.
- Report newly symptomatic children and staff daily to the AHS Public Health Outbreak team.

The AHS Public Health Outbreak team may provide facilities with an outbreak notification letter to inform parents/guardians of the outbreak.

- Distribute the letter to parents/guardians only if requested by the AHS Public Health Outbreak team.
- Consult with the AHS Public Health Outbreak team before distributing additional information about the outbreak. This ensures up-to-date and accurate information is provided.

Keep the facility illness free

Stay home when ill

- Remind parents/guardians to keep ill children home.
- Remind staff not to work when ill.

Monitor for illness

- Request staff watch children for **new** symptoms of illness and follow the facility illness plan if new symptoms are identified.
 - Send ill staff home as soon as possible.
 - Keep children away from others if they are ill at the facility.
 - Contact parents/guardians to pick up ill children as soon as possible.

Care for children who develop viral respiratory illness

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Care for children who develop GI illness

- Clean hands well and often.
- Promptly and thoroughly clean and disinfect areas soiled by vomit or feces.
- Have staff wear gloves and gown / protective clothing while caring for a child with GI illness. Consider using mask and face shield to protect from splashes.
 - Wash hands before and after wearing gloves.

Encourage frequent hand hygiene

Hand hygiene is the most effective way to prevent the spread of illness

- Encourage frequent hand washing. This is the preferred method for hand hygiene.
- Wash hands with plain soap and water:
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 - Older children may use alcohol-based hand rub with supervision by staff.
- Alcohol-based hand rub is not permitted for infants and toddlers.

Perform respiratory etiquette

- Promote respiratory etiquette (Cover Your Cough).
- Support those who choose to wear a mask.

Enhance cleaning and disinfection to prevent spread of illness

- Increase frequency of cleaning and disinfection of common areas and high-touch surfaces such as doorknobs, light switches, tabletops, washrooms and water fountains.
- Clean and disinfect shared items between users.
- Remove shared items such as craft supplies, books and puzzles that cannot be cleaned and disinfected.
- Use hand hygiene before and after using play structures that cannot be cleaned and disinfected.

Decrease the use of common or shared items

- Use shared play structures one group at a time.
- Close shared sensory tables including water/sand tables.
- Allow sensory bins or activities to be used only if they are not shared between children such as play dough labelled for individual child use or individual water bowl with sensory activities.

Prepare and serve food safely

- Ensure staff who support meals are feeling well and practice hand hygiene.
- Discontinue family-style meal service.

- Hand out snacks directly to children.

Minimize mixing of groups

- Have a plan to maintain child to staff ratios during an outbreak.
- Keep children and staff within the assigned child care room, including during naps, meals and snack times if possible.
- Move some group activities outdoors if weather permits.
- Follow physical distancing practices during viral respiratory illness outbreaks when possible.
 - Maintain distance between staff in common areas such as staff rooms.
- Postpone high-risk field trips and activities such as:
 - Events with visitors such as open houses and potluck meals
 - Visits to crowded indoor venues including swimming pools, concerts and food facilities
 - Destinations that require shared transport
 - Hands-on activities with shared items
 - Those that have multiple groups participating
 - Visits involving vulnerable populations such as continuing care homes, supportive living accommodations and hospitals.

Manage shared transportation

Staff who transport children:

- Wear a mask when transporting a child with viral respiratory illness symptoms.
- Provide a mask to children with viral respiratory illness symptoms, if tolerated.
- Stock protective clothing such as gowns and gloves, cleaning and disinfection products and garbage bags to clean and contain vomit or diarrhea.
- Increase frequency of cleaning and disinfection of shared transport vehicle, including high-touch surfaces such as door handles, rails and the steering wheel.

Control measures that may be used for complex outbreaks

The AHS Public Health Outbreak team will assess and monitor the outbreak in collaboration with the child care facility. Depending on the assessment and the type of outbreak, additional outbreak control measures not outlined in this guide may be recommended.

Ending an outbreak

The AHS Public Health Outbreak team determines when the outbreak is ended and advises when the control measures may be discontinued. The facility will continue with routine outbreak prevention practices when the outbreak is ended.

If additional children or staff develop symptoms within seven days of the outbreak ending, report to PPHST and let them know that an outbreak recently ended at the facility.