

Keeping Children Healthy

Winter is here and with it comes colds, flu, runny noses, and a host of germs waiting to spread among children and staff. Illnesses may be spread by coughing, sneezing, direct skin-to-skin contact, or touching a contaminated object or surface. How can you help children stay healthy? First and foremost – children and adults should wash their hands frequently throughout the day. Routine cleaning and sanitizing of all surfaces will also significantly reduce the transmission of germs. But how do you know if you are doing everything you should to maintain a healthy environment? What guidelines should you follow?

First, look for state and local guidelines related to health issues in childcare. State licensing requirements provide basic guidance related to health and safety; these requirements vary among states. State licensing and regulation information as well as links to other resources can be found at the National Resource Center (NRC) website. <http://nrc.uchsc.edu/>.

The most comprehensive health guidelines are found in *Caring for Our Children: National Health and Safety Performance Standards: Guidelines for Out-of-Home Child Care Programs: 2nd Edition*. This document lists more than 700 health and safety practices in the areas of staffing, program activities, health promotion and protection, nutrition, facilities and equipment, transportation, and infectious diseases. The National Resource Center <http://nrc.uchsc.edu/> has a searchable online version of this document. This resource describes best practice related to issues ranging from exclusion of ill children, to cleaning and sanitizing toys.

A companion document, *Stepping Stones*, includes a group of 234 Standards from *Caring for Our Children* that have been determined to have the greatest impact in reducing disease, disability, and death in child care. This document is also available online. Making sure all staff members are familiar with and meeting these requirements can enhance the quality of care for children.

To provide the best quality care for every child, caregivers should have access to reliable consultation on available resources in a variety of fields. This is the role of the childcare health consultant. Child care health consultants should be knowledgeable not only about child health, but also about out-of-home childcare in general, state childcare licensing requirements, and availability of health resources in the community. A national network of child care health consultants began as part of the Healthy Child Care America (HCCA) in 1995. Although federal support for state HCCA initiatives ended in January 2005, many states have leveraged other funding to support ongoing child care health and safety efforts and have identified HCCA representatives to serve as a point person at the state level. Through the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and the HCCA Campaign website <http://www.healthychildcare.org/> you can locate child care health consultants or other child health representatives in each state.

You can learn more about the role of the child care health consultants by visiting the website of the National Training Institute for Child Care Health Consultants (NTI) <http://www.sph.unc.edu/courses/childcare/>. A downloadable video entitled “Building Better Child Care through Health Consultation” introduces the profession of child care health consultation.

Equally important -- teach children what they can do to protect their own health. The healthy habits that children form early will last a lifetime.

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