

# **Guide for Outbreak Prevention and Control in Child Care Facilities**

**Includes Respiratory, Gastrointestinal and Rash Illnesses**

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## Introduction

Child care operators are responsible for protecting the health of both children under their care, and staff working in their facilities. Alberta Health Services (AHS) seeks to work collaboratively with child care facilities to prevent disease transmission. This includes preventing the spread of respiratory, gastrointestinal (GI), rash, and any other unusual illness identified within the child care facility.

Operators and staff should take the following measures to help prevent outbreaks and keep children and staff safe:

- Implement practices to minimize the risk of disease transmission such as those outlined in the “General Outbreak Prevention Practices” section below
- Develop policies and protocols to rapidly identify and manage individuals with symptoms of illness.
- Promote high levels of sanitation and personal hygiene
- Comply, to the extent possible, with AHS recommendations

This document has been developed to support licensed facility-based child care programs (i.e., day care, preschool, and out of school care) in reducing the risk of infection and transmission, and builds upon the [Alberta Health Services Health and Safety Child Care Guidelines](#), which all child care operators are recommended to follow at all times. All licensed child care facilities will also be required to be in compliance with applicable zoning and health and safety legislation, including the [Early Learning and Child Care Act](#) and [Early Learning and Child Care Regulation](#).

The measures in this document are intended for facility-based settings and are not required for home-based child care programs (i.e., family day homes), but may be used by home-based providers as a resource for optional mitigation steps or as best practice. Home-based providers are not asked to report illnesses or suspected outbreaks to AHS, but may contact AHS Coordinated Early Identification and Response (CEIR) at 1-844-343-0971 to seek consultation or ask questions.

### Scope

This guide is for the prevention, identification, reporting, assessment, control and management of common communicable disease outbreaks in child care settings in Alberta.

This guide provides general reporting processes and outbreak prevention measures for these settings. The AHS Public Health Outbreak Team (zone Medical Officers of Health, Communicable Disease Control, and Environmental Public Health) may recommend further measures to be implemented if required by an unusual outbreak.

The notification of outbreaks and other infectious disease threats in Alberta is mandated under Section 26 of the Alberta *Public Health Act*.

Child care facilities and families have an important role in helping control the spread of illness in these settings. Immunization is an important public health measure and all families, children and staff are encouraged to complete their routine immunizations, COVID-19 and influenza immunizations.

General outbreak prevention practices are important to prevent the spread of all communicable diseases. Child care settings are strongly encouraged to implement the general outbreak prevention practices listed in this guidance.

### General Outbreak Prevention Practices

- Parents/guardians should assess their children daily for new symptoms of illness.
- Children and staff should not attend care settings if they are ill.
- Encourage hand hygiene for children and staff.
- Encourage staff and children to practice [respiratory etiquette](#)

- Ensure frequent cleaning and disinfection of high touch surfaces using an appropriate product(s) – see [Public Health Recommendations for Environmental Cleaning of Public Facilities \(albertahealthservices.ca\)](https://www.albertahealthservices.ca).
- Optimize indoor air quality and ensure ventilation systems are maintained in accordance with manufacturer operational guidelines
- Water fountains should be cleaned and disinfected frequently.
- For child transportation in groups, have a plan that outlines cleaning and disinfecting protocols.
- Face masks are not required; however, children and staff can decide based on their own risk whether they want to wear a face mask.
- Child care settings are encouraged to have a plan in place if a child/staff member develops any symptoms of illness while at the care setting.
  - Ill children or staff should be sent home, where possible by private transportation
  - Ill children or staff should remain isolated in an area away from others while waiting to go home and may be provided with a face mask to wear (if appropriate).
- It is recommended that symptomatic individuals stay at home until they are feeling well, are able to fully participate in all normal child care activities and have reached the end of the recommended isolation period as applicable e.g.,
  - Respiratory Illness - Isolation recommendations can be found [here](#)
  - Gastrointestinal Illness - 48 hours after symptoms resolve
  - Rash Illness – depends on the type of rash that is present
    - Cases with rash illness do not need to be excluded if others at the facility were already exposed to the case while infectious and the case is feeling well enough to fully participate in all normal childcare activities, unless exclusion is specifically recommended by the AHS Public Health Outbreak Team.

**It is recommended that staff:**

- Be aware of the child care facility policy regarding illness and attendance.
- Monitor for and report additional cases of illness to the child care facility operator or designate.
- Be familiar with any applicable child care facility policies regarding recommendations for physical distancing, hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette, cleaning and disinfecting, and any other policies or procedures related to preventing transmission of illness.
- Have access to hand sanitizer or hand washing stations, as available.

## Reporting Illness to the AHS Public Health Outbreak Team

### Illness Surveillance

Child care facilities are responsible for identifying and reporting unusual occurrence of similar symptoms (see [Table A](#)). Child care facilities are asked to track the number of ill students as well as the symptoms reported by parents/guardians.

### How to Report Illness

The AHS Coordinated Early Identification and Response (CEIR) team is a provincial, centralized outbreak reporting and response resource. CEIR is available to licensed child care settings at 1-844-343-0971. Any facility that *does not already have an outbreak identified* must contact CEIR as soon as illness is identified as per [Table A](#). CEIR will provide initial guidance and decision-making support to the facility.

If an outbreak is identified, the AHS Public Health Outbreak Team will review initial outbreak control measures with the child care facilities to help reduce the spread of illness and will advise about how subsequent case reporting should be submitted based on the type of outbreak.

### Table A: Reporting to CEIR

Report to **CEIR at 1-844-343-0971** when the Reporting Criteria is met for these illnesses:

Type of Illness	Reporting Criteria (cases must be from different households)
<b>Respiratory or Gastrointestinal (GI) Illness</b>	2 or more children with NEW onset of 2 or more symptoms* due to illness within a 7 day period <b>OR</b> 2 or more children with NEW onset of GI illness only (nausea, vomiting or diarrhea) within 48 hours <b>OR</b> An unusual amount of individuals with similar symptoms**  <i>* Symptoms: cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, loss or altered sense of taste/smell, runny nose/nasal congestion, fever, fatigue (significant and unusual), muscle ache/joint pain, headache, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea</i>  <i>**Note: If there is an unusual increase in illness amongst staff (above the baseline of what would be expected), whether they were present at work with symptoms or not, it should be reported to CEIR as this could be an indicator of a potential outbreak</i>
<b>Rash Illness</b>	3 or more children with a rash illness within a 10 day period

Report to CEIR if there are questions or concerns about other unusual illnesses:

<b>Other Unusual Illness</b>	Facilities may call regarding diseases that may benefit from further advice and/or investigation, including Measles, Mumps, Pertussis (Whooping Cough), Meningitis, Hepatitis, and any other illnesses of concern.
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## Outbreak Measures

When CEIR is notified as per the *Reporting Criteria* in Table A, the AHS Public Health Outbreak Team will:

- Contact the child care facility to review details about the type of illness reported to CEIR. After this assessment, they will advise whether the outbreak definition has been met.
- Review General Outbreak Prevention Measures that are already in place in the child care facility (refer to the [Alberta Health Services Health and Safety Child Care Guidelines](#) for child care facilities).
- Provide information and recommendations to assist child care staff in preventing further spread of illness in the facility.
- Provide an information letter to the child care facility for dissemination to parents/guardians if deemed appropriate. The letter can make parents/guardians aware of the increased illness in the facility and provide recommendations to prevent the spread of illness, including keeping ill individuals at home. Child care facilities should not send out their own information letters informing parents of increased illness or communicable diseases in the facility without consulting the AHS Public Health Outbreak Team.

### Additional Outbreak Measures

The AHS Public Health Outbreak Team will assess and monitor the outbreak. Symptomatic individuals should not participate in off-site activities where there is potential to expose new people/places to illness. Depending on their assessment and the type of outbreak occurring, additional outbreak measures may be recommended in collaboration with the child care operators.

### General

- The AHS Public Health Outbreak Team will provide guidance to the child care facility including information that can be shared with parents/guardians regarding how to identify and prevent illness.
- Depending on their assessment, the AHS Public Health Outbreak Team may recommend, in collaboration with the facility, some or all of the following for affected groups:
  - Minimize the use of common or shared equipment. If shared use is necessary, clean and disinfect between groups.
  - Special events, performances or celebrations that involve bringing in family members/visitors be postponed (these events may lead to new exposures).
  - Postpone high-risk field trips and consider postponing other off-site activities during the outbreak. Higher risk activities might involve:
    - Crowded indoor venues
    - Hands on activities with shared items
    - Multiple groups attending
    - Shared transport
    - Vulnerable populations (e.g., congregate care, hospital)
- Moving some group activities outdoors where possible (e.g. physical and performance activities, nature walks).
- Minimizing mixing of different groups. Children should remain within their particular child care room as much as possible.
- Distancing in common areas (if possible) (e.g. hallways, washrooms).
- Use of face masks by staff is recommended for prolonged close interactions with children (e.g., changing a diaper or assisting with feeding).

### Cleaning and Disinfecting

- Increase frequency of daily cleaning and disinfection of common areas and surfaces. Pay particular attention to doorknobs, light switches, washrooms and other high-touch surfaces.

- Close shared sensory tables including water tables/sand tables and shared play dough.
- Individual sensory bins or activities that are not shared between children may be used (e.g., play dough labelled for individual child use, small individual water bowl with sensory activities).
- Stress hand hygiene for children and staff both at home and at the facility. Refer to the “Personal Hygiene” section in the [Alberta Health Services Health and Safety Child Care Guidelines](#).
- Items such as books and puzzles that cannot be cleaned and disinfected between uses should stay within each cohort room only.

### Minimizing Mixing and Use of Shared Spaces

- The AHS Public Health Outbreak Team may recommend children and staff in the affected rooms minimize interactions with other attendees (if possible) to decrease spread of illness.
- Each group should have designated equipment (e.g., balls, loose equipment) or should clean and disinfect equipment between cohort uses.
- It is recommended that naps take place within the groups designated room.
- If play structures are to be used by more than one group, the structures should only be used by one group at a time. As it is not possible to clean and disinfect these structures, strict hand hygiene is recommended before and after use.
- Child care facilities are encouraged to also use alternatives to licensed outdoor play spaces, such as walks and supervised play in parks and safe open spaces. Follow physical distancing practices when possible.

### Food

- Cease family-style meal service for the duration of the outbreak.
- Water fountains can remain open and should be cleaned and disinfected frequently.

### Transportation

- It is recommended that field trips be postponed during an outbreak. However, if children are using shared transportation before and after childcare (e.g. transportation to out-of-school care), the following would apply.
  - If a child becomes symptomatic with respiratory symptoms during the trip, a face mask may be made available as per site policy and worn by the child as tolerated. The driver should contact the facility to make the appropriate arrangements for the child to be picked up.
    - Drivers should consider wearing a face mask.
  - Increase frequency of cleaning and disinfection of applicable high-touch surfaces, such as door handles, child seats, rails, steering wheel, mobile devices and GPS prior to each run.

## Closing an Outbreak

- The AHS Public Health Outbreak Team will continue to monitor illness at the child care facility regularly to determine the extent/duration of outbreak as needed.
- The AHS Public Health Outbreak Team will advise child care facilities when the control measures can be lifted and the outbreak can be closed.
  - In some circumstances they may recommend continued control measures depending on their assessment of the outbreak.

## Other Resources

- [AHS IPC Hand Hygiene Resources](#)
- [Alberta Health Services Health and Safety Child Care Guidelines](#)