

Managing Outbreaks of Gastroenteritis in a Child Care Setting

Definition of gastroenteritis

Infectious gastroenteritis can include any of the following symptoms:

- vomiting
- diarrhoea (loose stools, often offensive). Can also have blood in the stools
- stomach pain
- excessive wind
- temperature $>37^{\circ}\text{C}$
- headache
- nausea

Definition of an outbreak

An outbreak in a child care centre is when 2 or more children and/or staff have diarrhoea or vomiting. They can also have any of the other symptoms listed above.

Notifying an outbreak

A child care centre experiencing an outbreak as defined above should notify Hunter New England Population Health is either 4924 6477 or 6767 4800.

When a child/staff member is hospitalised for treatment of symptoms, please notify HNE Population Health as this is often an indication of severity.

The following guidelines will assist in controlling an outbreak of gastroenteritis in the child care setting and have been adapted from NSW Health policy guidelines for gastro outbreaks in residential care facilities.

Personal hygiene staff and children

- Handwashing is the most important way of preventing the spread of gastroenteritis. Using Alcohol hand gel is another option.
- Children are to be supervised to wash their hands before and after playing, before and after eating, after playing with other children and after using the toilet.
- Staff need to wash their hands before and after handling food or drink, before and after using the toilet.
- Where possible, staff should be allocated to the same children for the entire day.
- Masks and gloves are to be worn when cleaning vomit or faeces as viruses may be aerosolised during these procedures. Discard masks and gloves after one use.

Food hygiene

- In the child care setting, staff should not prepare food and assist with child hygiene needs on the same shift. Where this is totally unavoidable, staff must thoroughly wash and dry hands between each activity.
- When assisting children with hygiene needs staff must wash their hands thoroughly before attending to any other task.
- Do not allow sharing of eating utensils or drinking containers between children. All eating utensils or drinking containers are to be washed and stored dry between uses.

- If food is prepared for children at the centre, it is recommended that a person is designated to food handling duties

Enhanced cleaning during an outbreak

- Cleaning of common areas should be attended at least twice daily with detergent. Pay particular attention to areas that are touched by children and carers. Items that cannot be cleaned between uses should not be made available for communal use during an outbreak. Wooden toys are not recommended for communal play as they are difficult to clean.
- Common bathroom areas should also be cleaned with detergent at least twice daily or more frequently, depending on how often they are used. These include common touch points such as toilet seats, flush handles, wash-hand basin taps, toilet door handles, handrails, tables and chairs.
- Toilet seats and change tables should be cleaned between uses.

Other measures

- Alert parents to a change of exclusion policy (where applicable). **Affected staff/children can return to the Centre when they have been free of symptoms for 48 hours.**
- Isolate affected children/staff from the rest of the group as soon as possible once symptoms appear. This may involve either dedicating a room to this group until they can be sent home (staff and children).
- Affected staff/children should be sent home and referred to their GP for management when necessary. To help identify the cause, encourage collection of stool specimens from those with symptoms who visit their GP. They would need to alert the GP that he/she is part of an outbreak.
- Minimise staff and children movement between rooms during an outbreak.
- Excursions and proposed visitors to the Centre should be postponed during the outbreak.
- Notify all parents that an outbreak has been notified and distribute the Viral Gastroenteritis fact sheet. <http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/factsheets/infectious/gastroenteritis.html>
- A nominated staff member should undertake liaison with the HNE Population Health by telephoning 4924 6477 (Newcastle) or 6767 4800 (Tamworth).
- Fax an updated line list daily of affected children and staff to HNE Population Health- 4924 6048 (Newcastle) or 6766 3003 (Tamworth). Population Health staff will monitor the outbreak using this line list and offer ongoing support where necessary.

Reference:

Guidance for the Control Management of the Human Transmission of Gastrointestinal infections, infestations and bacterial intoxications. Norwalk Health Authority – Communicable Disease Control Section

Control Communicable Diseases Manual Ed: /J. Chin, MD, MPH. American Public Health Association