

Childhood Infectious Diseases

Children are at increased risk of some infectious diseases because they have not yet developed immunity to them, they tend to gather in groups, and they may have difficulty with some aspects of hygiene.

Chicken Pox

Time from exposure to illness

2 to 3 weeks.

Symptoms:

Slight fever, runny nose, and a rash that begins as raised pink spots that blister and scab. Can be more severe in pregnant women and newborns.

Do I need to keep my child home?

Yes, for 5 days from the onset of the rash and the blisters have dried.

How can I help prevent spread?

Immunise your child at 18 months of age. Immunisation is recommended for children at 12 years if they are not immune.

Conjunctivitis

Time from exposure to illness

1-3 days.

Symptoms:

The eye feels scratchy, is red and may water. Lids may stick together on waking.

Do I need to keep my child home?

Yes, while there is discharge from the eye.

How can I help prevent spread?

Careful hand washing; avoid sharing towels. Antibiotics may be needed.

Gastroenteritis

Time from exposure to illness

Depends on the cause: several hours to several days.

Symptoms:

A combination of frequent loose or watery stools, vomiting, fever, stomach cramps, headaches.

Do I need to keep my child home?

Yes, at least for 24 hours after diarrhoea stops.

How can I prevent spread?

Careful hand washing with soap and water after using the toilet or handling nappies and before touching food.

German Measles (Rubella)

Time from exposure to illness

2 to 3 weeks.

Symptoms:

Often mild or no symptoms: mild fever, runny nose, swollen nodes, pink blotchy rash that lasts a short time. Can cause birth defects if pregnant women are infected.

Do I need to keep my child home?

Yes, for at least 4 days after the rash appears.

How can I help prevent spread?

Immunisation (MMR) at 12 months and 4 years of age.

Glandular Fever

Time from exposure to illness

2 to 3 weeks.

Symptoms:

Fever, headache, sore throat, tiredness, swollen nodes.

Do I need to keep my child home?

No, unless sick.

How can I help prevent spread?

Careful hand washing, avoid sharing drinks, food and utensils, and kissing.

Hand Foot and Mouth Disease

Time from exposure to illness

3 to 7 days.

Symptoms:

Mild illness, perhaps with a fever, blisters around the mouth, on the hands and feet, and perhaps the nappy area.

Do I need to keep my child home?

Yes, until the blisters have dried.

How can I help prevent spread?

Careful hand washing especially after wiping nose, using the toilet and changing nappies.

Head Lice

Time from infestation to eggs hatching

Usually 5 to 7 days.

Symptoms:

Itchy scalp, white specks stuck near the base of the hairs; lice may be found on the scalp.

Do I need to keep my child home?

No, as long as head lice management is ongoing.

How can I prevent spread?

Family, friends and classroom contacts should be examined and managed if infested.

Hepatitis A

Time from exposure to illness

About 2 to 6 weeks.

Symptoms:

Often none in small children; sudden fever, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, jaundice (yellowing of skin and eyes), dark urine, pale stools.

Do I need to keep my child home?

Yes, for 2 weeks after first symptoms or 1 week after onset of jaundice.

How can I help prevent spread?

Careful hand washing; close contacts may need to have an injection of immunoglobulin; immunisation is recommended for some people.

Impetigo

Time from exposure to illness

1 to 3 days.

Symptoms:

Small red spots change into blisters that fill up with pus and become crusted; usually on the face, hands or scalp.

Do I need to keep my child home?

Yes, until treatment starts. Sores should be covered with watertight dressings.

How can I prevent spread?

Careful hand washing.

Influenza

Time from exposure to illness

1 to 3 days.

Symptoms:

Sudden onset fever, runny nose, sore throat, cough, muscle aches and headaches.

Do I need to keep my child home?

Yes, until they look and feel better.

How can I prevent spread?

Careful hand washing, especially after coughing, sneezing or wiping your nose. Immunisation, is recommended for the elderly and people with chronic illnesses.

Measles

Time from exposure

About 10 to 12 days until first symptoms, and 14 days until the rash develops.

Symptoms:

Fever, tiredness, runny nose, cough and sore red eyes for a few days followed by a red blotchy rash that starts on the face and spreads down the body and lasts 4 to 7 days.

Do I need to keep my child home?

Yes, for at least 4 days after the rash appears.

How can I prevent spread?

Immunisation (MMR) at 12 months and 4 years. Contacts who are not immune may be excluded for 14 days after onset in the last case at the facility.

Meningococcal Disease

Time from exposure to illness

2 to 7 days.

Symptoms:

Sudden onset of fever and a combination of headache, neck, stiffness, nausea, vomiting, drowsiness or rash.

Do I need to keep my child home?

Seek medical attention immediately. Patient will need hospital treatment.

How can I help prevent spread?

Close contacts should see their doctors urgently if symptoms develop, and may need to have a special antibiotic. Immunisation with Meningococcal C vaccine at 12 months of age.

Molluscum Contagiosum

Time from exposure to illness

1 to 6 months.

Symptoms:

Multiple small lumps (2-5mm) on the skin that are smooth, firm and round, with dimples in the middle.

Lumps in children are mostly on the face, trunk, and upper arms and legs. Symptoms can last 6 months to 2 years.

Do I need to keep my child at home?

No.

How can I help prevent spread?

Avoid contact sports when a child has uncovered lumps

Mumps

Time from exposure to illness

14 to 25 days.

Symptoms:

Fever, swollen and tender glands around the jaw.

Do I need to keep my child home?

Yes, for 9 days after onset of swelling.

How can I prevent spread?

Immunisation (MMR) at 12 months and 4 years of age.

Ringworm

Time from exposure to till illness

Varies (may be several days).

Symptoms:

Small scaly patch on the skin surrounded by a pink ring.

Do I need to keep my child home?

Yes, until the day after fungal treatment has begun.

How can I help prevent spread?

Careful hand washing.

Scabies

Time from exposure to illness

New infections: 2 to 6 weeks; reinfection: 1 to 4 days.

Symptoms:

Itchy skin, worse at night. Worse around wrists, armpits, buttocks, groin and between fingers and toes.

Do I need to keep my child home?

Yes, until the day after the treatment has begun.

How can I prevent spread?

Close contacts should be examined for infestation and be treated if necessary. Wash linen, towels and clothing worn in the past 2 days in hot water and detergent.

Scarlet Fever

Time from exposure to illness

1 to 3 days.

Symptoms:

Sudden onset sore throat, high fever and vomiting, followed by a rash in 12 to 36 hours.

Do I need to keep my child home?

Yes, until at least 24 hours of treatment has begun and the child is feeling better.

How can I prevent spread?

Careful hand washing. Sick contacts should see their doctor.

Slapped Cheek

Time from exposure to illness

1 to 2 weeks.

Symptoms:

Mild fever, red cheeks, itchy lace-like rash, and possibly cough, sore throat or runny nose. Can cause foetal disease in pregnant women if they have not been previously infected.

Do I need to keep my child home?

No as it is most infectious before the rash appears.

How can I prevent spread?

Careful hand washing; avoid sharing drinks.

Whooping Cough

Time from exposure to illness

7 to 20 days.

Symptoms:

Starts with a running nose, followed by persistent cough that comes in bouts. Bouts maybe followed by vomiting and a whooping sound as the child gasps for air.

Do I need to keep my child home?

Yes, until the first 5 days of a special antibiotic have been taken.

How can I help prevent spread?

Immunisation at 2, 4, 6 months and 4 years of age. A special antibiotic can be given for the patient and close contacts. Case should be excluded from childcare and school until 5 days after treatment begins.

Unimmunised contacts may be excluded from childcare unless they take the special antibiotic.

Related links

- Staying Healthy in Child Care - Preventing infectious diseases in child care (4th Ed)
<http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/synopses/ch43syn.htm>

Further information - Public Health Units in NSW

For more information please contact your doctor, local public health unit or community health centre - look under NSW Government at the front of the White Pages

Metropolitan Areas	Location	Number	Rural Areas	Location	Number
Northern Sydney/Central Coast	Hornsby	02 9477 9400	Greater Southern	Goulburn	02 4824 1837
	Gosford	02 4349 4845		Albury	02 6080 8900
South Eastern Sydney/Illawarra	Randwick	02 9382 8333	Greater Western	Broken Hill	08 8080 1499
	Wollongong	02 4221 6700		Dubbo	02 6841 5569
Sydney South West	Camperdown	02 9515 9420		Bathurst	02 6339 5601
Sydney West	Penrith	02 4734 2022	Hunter/New England	Newcastle	02 4924 6477
	Parramatta	02 9840 3603		Tamworth	02 6764 8000
Justice Health Service	Matraville	02 9311 2707	North Coast	Port Macquarie	02 6588 2750
				Lismore	02 6620 7500

See full details of Public Health Units at
www.health.nsw.gov.au/publichealth/infectious/plus.asp

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