

VIRAL GASTROENTERITIS UPDATE

Information for Childcare Centre Directors

Please distribute this information to all staff

Key points:

1. Gastroenteritis outbreak notifications have increased in childcare centres across NSW
2. Alert staff to be vigilant for symptoms of gastroenteritis in children
3. Reinforce basic hygiene measures, such as regular hand washing, to prevent the spread of infection
4. Exclude sick children and staff for at least 48 hours after their last symptoms

Summary

Nearly 60 outbreaks of gastroenteritis in early childhood education and childcare centres in NSW were reported in October, which is significantly higher than the usual rates at this time of year. Over 480 children and 120 staff were affected. Very high numbers continue to be reported throughout November.

Actions to prevent spread

- Alert your staff to remain vigilant for symptoms of gastroenteritis in children.
- Reinforce basic hygiene measures, such as regular hand washing (pay particular attention to hand washing after attending to nappy changes), cleaning all hard surfaces, and provide education to help prevent the spread of infections.
- Exclude sick children and staff from attending the centre for **at least 48 hours** after their symptoms settle. Remind parents that all family members in households affected by gastro should avoid visiting hospitals and aged care facilities until at least 48 hours after the last person in the household has recovered.
- Wear gloves and a mask when cleaning up bodily fluids, including vomit, when symptoms commence at the centre. Disinfect surfaces with a freshly made sodium hypochlorite solution.
- Promptly notify your local public health unit on **1300 066 055** if an outbreak is suspected. An outbreak should be suspected when 2 or more children or staff have sudden onset of vomiting or diarrhoea in a 2 day period. Reporting is required under the Public Health Act.


About viral gastroenteritis

Viral gastroenteritis is a common intestinal infection caused by a number of different viruses, usually resulting in vomiting and/or diarrhoea. Viral gastroenteritis is highly infectious and may spread rapidly in childcare centres. It is spread by the vomit or faeces of an infected person either: from close contact with infected persons; contact with surfaces contaminated by vomit or faeces; or consuming food or drink contaminated with vomit or faeces. Viruses are often spread from person-to-person on unwashed hands.

Further information

Resources to assist in the management of viral gastroenteritis in child care centres are available at: <http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/gastroenteritis/Pages/default.aspx>

The Gastro Pack for childcare centres provides checklists of actions to be taken, advice on infection control measures and signage resources for gastroenteritis outbreaks. This is available at: <https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/gastroenteritis/Documents/ccg-gastro-pack.pdf>



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