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Childcare and children's health

An information sheet for parents

Reducing Infectious Disease

It is natural that as children begin to have more contact with the wider world they become more exposed to viruses and bacteria that can cause disease. Taking steps to reduce the spread of infectious disease is especially important in childcare settings where many children congregate.

□ Immunisation

Immunisation is the most effective way to safely protect your child from serious infectious disease. Before immunisation these infectious diseases caused much ill-health, disability, and death. Immunisation is still vital to prevent outbreaks of disease even though improvements in our living conditions over time have also helped to reduce infectious disease. The national immunisation schedule protects children (free of charge) against:

- Pertussis (Whooping cough)
- Haemophilus influenzae type b (Hib)
- Mumps
- Meningococcal disease
- Diphtheria
- Polio
- Rubella (German measles)
- Tetanus
- Measles
- Hepatitis B



Immunisation against chicken pox (varicella), pneumococcal disease, and influenza is also recommended. See <http://immunise.health.gov.au> for further information on the current schedule.

Immunising your child

It is important to ensure that your child is immunised on time, and that their immunisations are kept up to date. Children can still be safely and effectively immunised on time if they have a mild illness such as a cold or mild fever. Childcare centres must keep the immunisation records of children attending the centre. It is important to update your own records and those at the childcare centre each time your child has an immunisation. Childcare centres must have a policy on the exclusion of children who are not immunised for when there is a case of the disease at the centre. This is necessary to protect the unimmunised child and to prevent further spread of the disease.

Side effects

Some children may experience short-term minor side-effects from immunisation, such as a mild fever, irritability, or tenderness at the site of the vaccination. These side-effects usually do not last more than 48 hours. Paracetamol can be used to reduce side-effects (given immediately before and then for 24 hours following immunisation). Research on immunisations over many years has shown that serious side-effects are extremely rare. We know that the benefits of immunisation by far outweigh the risks. Please discuss this further with your health professional if necessary.

□ Hygiene and Infection Control Measures

Hygiene and infection control measures are also necessary to prevent the spread of infectious disease. Children's services are required to comply with Government regulations on infection control. Each State also has health regulations governing the exclusion of children with infectious disease.

Infections are commonly spread in two ways: **Droplet spread** by coughing and sneezing; and **direct contact** from person to person, or with infected surfaces. To reduce the spread of infection it is important to wash hands after changing a nappy or after wiping a child's nose, to properly dispose of soiled nappies or tissues, to wash shared toys and utensils, and to wipe down surfaces. Infection control measures are especially important in preventing highly contagious common childhood infections, such as conjunctivitis, gastroenteritis, and hand, foot and mouth disease.

This Parent Fact Sheet is available in different community languages and can be downloaded for printing from the Early Childhood Connections website. www.ecconnections.com.au

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