

Provincial Population & Public Health  
Communicable Disease Control  
Safe Healthy Environments

# Guide for Outbreak Prevention & Control in Child Care Facilities

Includes Respiratory, Gastrointestinal & Rash Illness

### **Do you have feedback about the guide?**

We welcome your feedback for the following:

- Incorrect information
- Spelling errors
- Inconsistencies

Submit feedback in an email to: [CDCResourceFeedback@share.albertahealthservices.ca](mailto:CDCResourceFeedback@share.albertahealthservices.ca).

Note: If you have questions about a specific outbreak, or site-specific processes, always direct your questions to your designated site lead or the AHS Public Health Outbreak Team investigator.

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## Introduction

This guide supports licensed facility-based child care programs (such as day care, preschool, and out of school care) to reduce the risk of spreading disease. It builds on the [Alberta Health Services Health and Safety Child Care Guidelines](#), which child care facilities are recommended to follow at all times. Licensed child care facilities must comply with applicable zoning and health and safety legislation. This includes the [Early Learning and Child Care Act](#) and the [Early Learning and Child Care Regulation](#).

Child care operators are responsible to protect the health of children under their care, and staff working in their facilities. Child care facilities are required to report outbreaks<sup>1</sup> and other communicable diseases<sup>2</sup> under Section 26 of the Alberta [Public Health Act](#).

Alberta Health Services (AHS) collaborates with child care facilities to prevent an outbreak of disease and responds when notified of potential outbreaks. This includes preventing the spread of respiratory, gastrointestinal (GI), rash, and any other unusual illnesses identified within a child care facility.

Although this guide is intended for facility-based settings, home-based child care programs (i.e., family day homes), may use it as a resource. Home-based providers are not required to report illnesses or suspected outbreaks to AHS but may consult with AHS Population Public Health Support Team (PPHST) at 1-844-343-0971 for support.

Child care facilities are recommended to take the following measures to prevent outbreaks and keep children and staff safe:

- Implement routine practices to stop the spread of illness, such as those outlined in the [general outbreak prevention practices](#).
- Develop policies to rapidly identify and manage individuals with symptoms of illness.
- Promote high levels of environmental cleaning, respiratory etiquette, and hand hygiene.
- Notify PPHST as outlined in [reporting illness to PPHST](#).
- Comply, wherever possible, with all AHS recommendations.

### Land Acknowledgement

Our work takes place on historical and contemporary Indigenous lands, including the territories of Treaty 6, Treaty 7 & Treaty 8 and the homeland of the Métis Nation of Alberta and eight Metis Settlements. We also acknowledge the many Indigenous communities that have been forged in urban centres across Alberta.

[Immunization](#) is an important public health measure. All families, children and staff are encouraged to complete their routine immunizations, including COVID-19 and influenza. Both Influenza and COVID-19 vaccines are safe, effective and offer the best defense against serious illness. These vaccines are recommended for all individuals six months of age and older.

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<sup>1</sup> An outbreak occurs when there are more cases of a communicable disease than are normally expected in a specific time and place.

<sup>2</sup> A communicable disease is an illness caused by an organism or micro-organism or its toxic products that is transmitted directly or indirectly from an infected person or animal or the environment.

## Scope

This guide is for the prevention, identification, reporting, and management of common communicable disease outbreaks in child care settings. If an outbreak is identified, the AHS Public Health Outbreak Team will recommend measures to manage the outbreak. The AHS Public Health Outbreak Team includes zone Medical Officers of Health, Communicable Disease Control, and Environmental Public Health.

The term child care facility is used throughout the guide when referring to operators and staff in licensed child care facilities.

## General outbreak prevention practices

General outbreak prevention practices are important to stop the spread of all communicable diseases. Child care facilities are recommended to routinely use the following prevention practices before, during and after an outbreak.

### Support a healthy environment

- Ensure frequent cleaning and disinfection of high touch surfaces. When cleaning and disinfecting, use appropriate products. Follow the [Public Health Recommendations for Environmental Cleaning of Public Facilities](#).
- Provide easy access to hand sanitizer and hand washing stations.
- Encourage [hand washing](#) for children and staff.
  - For more information see the [AHS IPC Hand Hygiene Resources](#).
- Encourage children and staff to practice [respiratory etiquette](#).
- Support children and staff who choose to wear face masks.
- Improve the air quality in the facility by optimizing ventilation systems.

### Prepare for illness

- Have a plan in place if a child or staff develops symptoms of illness at the facility.
  - Send symptomatic staff home.
  - Contact parents/guardians to pick up symptomatic children as soon as possible using private transportation.
    - Keep symptomatic children in an area away from others while they wait to be picked up.
    - Children with respiratory symptoms are recommended to wear a face mask (if tolerated) to protect others.
    - Children with GI symptoms are recommended to use a dedicated washroom (if possible).
  - Have staff interacting with symptomatic children wear appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) such as a face mask and/or gloves.
- Have a plan that outlines cleaning and disinfection measures for group transportation.
- Familiarize staff with child care facility policies regarding:
  - Attendance and illness
  - Monitoring and reporting children with symptoms of illness
  - [Hand washing](#), [respiratory etiquette](#), and [cleaning and disinfection](#).

### Monitor for illness

- Ask parents/guardians to watch their children daily for new symptoms of illness and keep them home if they are symptomatic.
- Ask staff to watch children for new symptoms of illness and follow the facility illness plan if symptoms are identified.

### Plan a safe return

Share the following recommendations with staff and parents/guardians about when it is safe to return:

- **Respiratory Illness:** Stay home until all symptoms have improved, feeling well enough to resume normal activities, and be fever-free for 24 hours without using fever-reducing medications.
- **Gastrointestinal Illness:** Stay home until 48 hours after all symptoms have resolved.
- **Rash Illness:** Stay home for the length of time recommended by the AHS Public Health Outbreak Team. How long to stay home depends on the cause of the rash.

## Reporting illness to PPHST

### Illness surveillance

The AHS Public Health Outbreak Team identifies outbreaks by assessing patterns and symptoms of illness. Facilities are responsible to:

- Monitor the number of ill children and their symptoms. This is called illness surveillance.
- Report to AHS Population Public Health Support Team (PPHST). See [Table A](#).

**Contact PPHST at 1-844-343-0971** to receive initial guidance and decision-making support. PPHST is a provincial, centralized outbreak reporting and response resource (formerly known as CEIR).

### Table A – Reporting illness to PPHST

Child care facilities notify PPHST at **1-844-343-0971** when the Reporting Criteria are met.

Type of Illness	Reporting Criteria										
<b>Respiratory Illness</b>	<p>Within a <b>seven-day</b> period:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two or more children (from different households) with new onset of two or more symptoms from the list below:               <table border="0" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%;">- Cough</td> <td style="width: 50%;">- Fever</td> </tr> <tr> <td>- Shortness of breath</td> <td>- Fatigue (significant and unusual)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>- Sore throat</td> <td>- Muscle ache / joint pain</td> </tr> <tr> <td>- Loss or altered sense of taste/smell</td> <td>- Headache</td> </tr> <tr> <td>- Runny nose / nasal congestion</td> <td>- Nausea/diarrhea</td> </tr> </table> </li> </ul>	- Cough	- Fever	- Shortness of breath	- Fatigue (significant and unusual)	- Sore throat	- Muscle ache / joint pain	- Loss or altered sense of taste/smell	- Headache	- Runny nose / nasal congestion	- Nausea/diarrhea
- Cough	- Fever										
- Shortness of breath	- Fatigue (significant and unusual)										
- Sore throat	- Muscle ache / joint pain										
- Loss or altered sense of taste/smell	- Headache										
- Runny nose / nasal congestion	- Nausea/diarrhea										
<b>Gastrointestinal Illness</b>	<p>Within a <b>48-hour</b> period:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two or more children with new onset of symptoms who meet the GI illness case definition:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Two or more episodes of diarrhea in a 24-hour period <b>OR</b></li> <li>○ Two or more episodes of vomiting in a 24-hour period <b>OR</b></li> <li>○ One or more episodes of vomiting AND diarrhea in a 24-hour period <b>OR</b></li> <li>○ One episode of bloody diarrhea <b>OR</b></li> <li>○ Laboratory confirmation of a known enteric pathogen</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>Note:</b> Report an unusual increase in staff with GI illness (above the baseline of what would be expected) to PPHST whether or not they were present at work with symptoms. This could be an indicator of a GI outbreak.</p>										
<b>Rash Illness</b>	<b>Three or more</b> children with a similar rash illness within a <b>10-day period</b>										
<b>Other Unusual Illness</b>	<p>Report to PPHST if there are questions or concerns about other unusual illnesses.</p> <p>Facilities are recommended to call regarding diseases that may benefit from further advice and/or investigation. This includes measles, mumps, pertussis (whooping cough), meningitis, hepatitis, and any other illnesses of concern.</p>										

## Outbreak control measures

### Universal outbreak measures

PPHST will notify the AHS Public Health Outbreak Team if the **reporting criteria** in [Table A](#) are met. The AHS Public Health Outbreak Team will contact the facility to discuss the illness details and determine if there is an outbreak.

**For respiratory illness outbreaks:** Once the outbreak is **open** facilities may direct questions to 1-833-592-2029 or email [CD\\_Outbreak\\_School\\_DayCare@albertahealthservices.ca](mailto:CD_Outbreak_School_DayCare@albertahealthservices.ca).

**For all other types of outbreaks,** use the contact information provided by the AHS Public Health Outbreak Team.

If an outbreak is declared, the AHS Public Health Outbreak Team will:

- Discuss the [general outbreak prevention practices](#) and refer to the [Alberta Health Services Health and Safety Child Care Guidelines](#).
- Provide information and recommendations to identify and prevent further spread of illness.
- Cease family-style meal service for the duration of the outbreak.
- Direct facility to start [enhanced cleaning and disinfection](#).
- Discuss modifications for [shared transportation](#).

### Enhanced cleaning and disinfection

When an outbreak is declared, the child care facility will enhance cleaning and disinfection. Below are some of the practices that will help reduce germs and prevent spread of illness.

- Increase frequency of daily cleaning and disinfection of common areas and surfaces. Pay particular attention to doorknobs, light switches, desktops, washrooms and other high-touch surfaces.
- Provide consistent reminders to children and staff about hand hygiene. Refer to the Personal Hygiene section in the [Alberta Health Services Health and Safety Child Care Guidelines](#).
- Minimize the use of common or shared items (such as craft supplies, toys, books, and puzzles).
  - If shared use is necessary, clean and disinfect between users.
- Close shared sensory tables including water tables / sand tables and shared play dough.
- Allow individual sensory bins or activities to be used only if they are not shared between children (such as play dough labelled for individual child use, small individual water bowl with sensory activities).
- Allow water fountains to remain open only if they can be cleaned and disinfected frequently.

### Shared transportation

If a child becomes symptomatic while using shared transportation to or from child care (such as out of school care), the child care facility can:

- Recommend that the driver wear a face mask when transporting a symptomatic child.
- Recommend that the driver contact the child care facility.
- Provide a face mask for the symptomatic child if it is available and will be tolerated.
- Make arrangements for the symptomatic child to go home.
- If GI symptoms such as vomiting are present, recommend appropriate supplies to contain vomit and appropriate PPE and supplies to manage cleaning.



- Increase the frequency of cleaning and disinfection of the shared transport vehicle. This includes high-touch surfaces, such as door handles, rails, steering wheel, mobile devices, and GPS.

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## Additional outbreak measures

The AHS Public Health Outbreak Team will assess and monitor the outbreak in collaboration with the child care facility. Depending on their assessment and the type of outbreak, additional outbreak measures may be recommended.

### General facility measures

The AHS Public Health Outbreak Team may provide a letter for parents/guardians. This letter provides information about the outbreak and how to prevent the spread of illness.

- Facilities should consult with the AHS Public Health Outbreak Team prior to sending their own illness or outbreak communication to parents/guardians to ensure up-to-date information is provided.

In collaboration with the facility operator, the following additional measures may be recommended:

- Clean and disinfect toys between users.
  - If toys cannot be cleaned and disinfected, the toys are recommended to be removed until the outbreak has ended.
- Use shared play structures one group at a time.
  - Strict hand hygiene is recommended before and after if structures cannot be cleaned and disinfected.
- Move some group activities outdoors (such as physical and performance activities, play, nature walks in public parks and safe open spaces).
- Minimize mixing of different groups. Children and staff are recommended to remain within their particular child care room as much as possible, including during naps, meals and snack times.
- Follow physical distancing practices when possible.
  - Maintain distance between staff in common areas (such as staff rooms, washrooms).
- Postpone special events, performances or celebrations that involve bringing in family members and visitors.
- Postpone high-risk field trips and activities such as:
  - Crowded indoor venues
  - Shared transport
  - Hands on activities with shared items
  - Multiple rooms attending
  - Visits involving vulnerable populations (such as congregate care, hospital)
- Consider postponing other off-site activities.

## Ending an outbreak

The AHS Public Health Outbreak Team will determine when an outbreak is over and will advise when the control measures can be discontinued. The facility is recommended to conduct a thorough enhanced cleaning and disinfection in all areas prior to returning to regular operations.

If additional clients develop symptoms within seven days of the outbreak ending, review [reporting illness to PPHST](#) AND let PPHST know that an outbreak recently ended at the facility.