Infection Control 101: Managing Illness, Outbreaks, and Hand Hygiene Meeting Kit



WHAT’S AT STAKE

Childcare settings are environments where germs can spread easily. Young children frequently touch shared surfaces, share toys, and place their hands or objects in their mouths. Because their immune systems and hygiene habits are still developing, even mild illnesses can move quickly through a classroom and affect children, staff, and families.

WHAT’S THE DANGER

Illness can spread quickly in childcare environments when prevention routines are not followed consistently.

Fast Transmission

Children in group care experience significantly more respiratory and gastrointestinal infections than those cared for at home. Germs spread easily through hands, shared toys, and contaminated surfaces.

Outbreak Risk

Childcare settings are common locations for outbreaks of illnesses such as norovirus, influenza, RSV, and hand foot and mouth disease. One sick child can expose many others in a short period of time.

Impact on Staff

Illness does not affect children alone. Staff may also become sick, increasing absenteeism and placing additional pressure on remaining team members.

Operational Disruption

When illness spreads, childcare centres may face room closures, staffing shortages, and increased concerns from families, especially during cold and flu season.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

Prevention works best when hygiene and illness control practices are routine, visible, and consistent every day.

Hand Hygiene First

Proper handwashing is one of the most effective ways to reduce illness. Washing with soap and water removes germs more effectively than sanitizer when hands are visibly dirty. Encourage regular handwashing throughout the day.

Clean High Touch Surfaces

Viruses can survive on surfaces for hours or even days. Toys, tables, door handles, light switches, and bathroom fixtures should be cleaned and disinfected frequently.

Key Infection Control Practices:

- Wash hands frequently with soap and water, especially before meals and after toileting
- Clean and disinfect shared surfaces and toys regularly
- Watch for early signs of illness such as fatigue or behaviour changes
- Follow exclusion policies and keep sick children and staff at home
- Improve ventilation by increasing airflow or opening windows

Recognize Symptoms Early

Children often show subtle signs before becoming visibly ill. Responding early helps prevent the spread of infection.

Increase Ventilation

Studies cited by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency show that improved ventilation reduces airborne virus concentration indoors. Fresh air is a simple but powerful control.

FINAL WORD

Infection control is not about fear. It is about routine. When hygiene, observation, and communication are built into daily practice, illness spreads less, children stay healthier, and programs stay open.