

A Guide to Common Childhood Infections

Please note this is intended as a Guide ONLY. Please consult a physician for diagnosis or recommendations on a particular case.

Infection	How it Spreads	Signs/Symptoms	Contagious Period	School Exclusion & Reporting Requirements
GASTROINTESTINAL INFECTIONS				
Diarrhea	Spread by ingesting contaminated food or water. Can also be spread from person to person, and by touching contaminated surfaces.	Increase frequency of stool and/or change to unformed loose or watery stool. May be accompanied with abdominal pain.	Exclude for duration of diarrhea.	Until symptom free for 24 hours.
RESPIRATORY INFECTIONS				
Influenza	By breathing in contaminated air, from sneezing, coughing, and speaking. Can also be spread by touching contaminated hands, surfaces, or objects.	Starts with headache chills and cough. Followed by a fever, loss of appetite, muscle aches, fatigue, runny nose and throat irritation. Young children may experience stomach upset and/or vomiting.	1 day before to 7 days after onset of symptoms.	Do not exclude if well enough to participate in activities. REPORTABLE TO HEALTH UNIT
Whooping cough (pertussis)	NOTE: whooping cough is one of the most contagious diseases.	First signs are coughing and sneezing. 1-2 weeks after first signs, coughs become convulsive-like with a high-pitched gasp (called a whoop). Incubation period 6-20 days.	Very contagious from start of symptoms for 3 weeks. If treated with antibiotics, will not be contagious 5 days after start of treatment.	Exclude until 5 days after start of antibiotics or 3 weeks if no treatment given. People in contact with infected person may need antibiotics or vaccine. REPORTABLE TO HEALTH UNIT
SKIN INFECTIONS				
Chickenpox (varicella)	Spread person to person and via air. Very infectious. May develop following contact with a person who has shingles.	Sudden onset of mild fever. Small red pimples which develop into blisters, then become encrusted. Usually affect face, hands, neck and extremities. Incubation period 10-21 days.	1-5 days before rash starts until blisters become encrusted.	Return to school or childcare as soon as child is well enough to participate in all activities (regardless of the state of the rash). REPORTABLE TO HEALTH UNIT
Impetigo	Direct skin contact with wounds or discharges from an infected person. Can be spread by touching contaminated hands, surfaces or objects.	Pustules or crusted rash on face or exposed parts of the body (arms and/or legs).	During period symptoms are present until 24 hours after start of treatment with antibiotics.	Exclude until antibiotic treatment has been taken for 24 hours. Exclude until seen by family physician and treatment started. Avoid contact sports until cleared by a physician to return to sports. Exclude until 24 hours after first treatment is applied.
OTHER INFECTIONS				
Fifth Disease	By breathing in contaminated air, from sneezing, coughing, and speaking. Can also be spread by touching contaminated hands, surfaces, or objects.	Rash begins as a solid red area on cheeks (like a slapped cheek), spreading to upper arms and legs, trunk, hands and feet. Incubation period 4-20 days.	2 days before rash appears. No longer contagious once rash appears.	Do not exclude if well enough to take part in activities.
Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease (coxsackie virus)	By breathing in contaminated air, from sneezing, coughing, and speaking. Can also be spread by touching contaminated hands, surfaces, or objects. This disease spreads very easily in child care settings.	Starts with fever and sore throat. Rash then develops on the palms of hands, bottom of feet and inside of mouth. Rash may look like tiny red dots or blisters.	Most contagious when symptoms are present, usually 7-10 days. Feces may be contagious for several weeks.	Exclude until fever is gone and child is well enough to participate in daily activities.
Measles (red measles)	Very contagious. Spreads by breathing in contaminated air, from sneezing, coughing, and speaking. Can also be spread by touching contaminated hands, surfaces or objects.	Fever, cough, runny nose, inflamed eyes for 1-3 days before onset of rash. Rash is large red spots, which often join together. Starts on face and spreads rapidly over body. Illness lasts 5-10 days. Incubation period 7-18 days.	4 days before rash is present, during period illness and until 4 days after the disappearance of rash.	Exclude until at least 4 days after onset of rash. At the direction of the Health Unit. REPORTABLE TO HEALTH UNIT
Mumps	Spreads by breathing in contaminated air, from sneezing, coughing and speaking. Can also be spread by touching contaminated hands, surfaces or objects.	Chills, discomfort, headache, pain below ears, fever, swelling of one or both salivary glands. Swelling is below and in front of ear. Incubation period 12-25 days.	7 days before swelling starts and for the first 15 days of swelling.	Excluded for 9 days or until the swelling is gone. At the direction of the Health Unit. Exclude for 7 days after onset of rash. At the direction of the Health Unit. REPORTABLE TO HEALTH UNIT

For a more complete list of childhood infections or disease fact sheets, go to www.yourhealthunit.ca