

Overview

Infectious diseases can have a significant impact on schools. Successful infection control programs are critical to maintaining a safe school environment through preventing or minimising the risk of transmission of infectious diseases.

Infection control program requirements

Develop and implement an infection control program that minimises the risk of exposure of infection to staff, students and others, including:

- Document infection control process and communicate to all staff
- Implement appropriate infection control processes, training and equipment (e.g. gloves, hand washing facilities, waste disposal, sharps management, etc.)
- Understand the legislative requirements for infectious diseases such as the minimum periods of exclusion and notification requirements
- Review infection control measures to ensure they are providing an adequate level of safety.

Strategies to prevent the spread of infectious diseases

Hand Washing – Schools should ensure that staff and students have access to hand washing facilities including mild liquid soaps and hand towels.

Coughing and sneezing – Staff and students should be encouraged to exercise good hygiene practices, including covering their mouth and nose with a tissue and washing hands after using or disposing of tissues.

Cleaning – Cleaning and disinfection materials should be readily available in the school, particularly in food preparation, first aid, and physical education areas in the event of a blood or body substance spill.

Food Handling and Storage – Foods need to be handled correctly to ensure that they do not become contaminated. If food is not stored, displayed or transported correctly bacteria can multiply to dangerous levels.

Sand Pit/Soft Fall – Sand pits can be a source of infection and need to be well maintained and kept clean. When not in use, it is recommended that sand pits be securely covered to prevent contamination, particularly with animal waste

Waste Management – Ensure that appropriate and sufficient waste receptacles are available and a waste disposal regime is in place to manage various types of waste including sanitary waste, sharps disposal etc.

Safe Handling of Sharps – Sharps may be contaminated with blood or bodily fluids, chemical, posing a risk of infection or illness if they penetrate the skin. It is essential to follow safe procedures when using and disposing of sharps.

Spills Management (blood and bodily fluids) – Should be dealt with as soon as possible. Assume all blood and body substances are potentially infectious.



Animals in Schools – Animals may carry infections, so hands must be washed after handling any animals.

School Exclusion

Schools should ensure that they are aware of the infectious diseases exclusion periods and the infectious diseases that are notifiable to the Department of Health.

Exclusion periods for common infectious diseases

Condition	Exclusion of cases
Chickenpox	Exclude until all blisters have dried. This is usually at least 5 days after the rash appears in unimmunised children, but may be less in previously immunised children
Conjunctivitis	Exclude until discharge from eyes has ceased
Diarrhoea	Exclude until there has not been a loose bowel motion for 24 hours
Herpes (cold sores)	Young children unable to comply with good hygiene practices should be excluded while the lesion is weeping. Lesions to be covered by a dressing, where possible
Impetigo	Exclude until appropriate treatment has commenced. Sores on exposed surfaces must be covered with a watertight dressing
Influenza and influenza-like illnesses	Exclude until well

Adapted from: Table 1: Minimum period of exclusion from primary schools and children's services centres for infectious diseases cases and contacts (Public Health Health and Wellbeing Regulations 2009, Schedule 7)

Resources

- *Infectious diseases exclusion periods*
- *Notification requirements for infectious diseases*
- *Standard Precautions for Infection Control*

Related Topics

- *First Aid*

Legislation

- *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 (VIC)*
- *Occupational Health and Safety Regulations 2007*