



Enteric Outbreaks in Child Care and Early Years

We are seeing an increase in enteric illness (vomiting and diarrhea) in our community, and an increase in enteric outbreaks in the child care and early years services. This information sheet provides an overview of the important role child care and early years' service providers play in preventing and managing enteric outbreaks.

Reporting Requirements

Child care and early years service providers should [report](#) to Ottawa Public Health (OPH) when there is a suspect outbreak, which is:

- Three or more cases of gastrointestinal (GI) illness (child and/or staff) occurs within a group, or the entire facility within a three-day period, even if symptoms occurred at home, OR
- One or more case(s) of a [reportable communicable disease](#) in the program, group or centre

Enteric Outbreak Overview

When an enteric outbreak is declared in a child care and early years program, group or centre,

- An investigator from OPH and a unique outbreak number will be assigned to your facility.
- A letter will be provided by OPH and that is intended to be shared with parents/guardians/caregivers and service providers, notifying them of the increase in illness.
- A blank line list (list that tracks symptomatic individuals) will be provided by OPH where symptomatic individuals can be tracked for the duration of the outbreak.
- A site visit will be completed by OPH.
- An investigator from OPH will contact your facility daily for updates.
- You will be provided with 3 stool kits per outbreak for stool sample testing.

Stool Sample Collection and Testing

During an enteric outbreak, it is important to know which organism is causing the illness. This ensures the appropriate outbreak control measures are in place to prevent the spread of illness in your facility.

- Only symptomatic (diarrhea, vomiting) children and staff in the last 48 hours are eligible for a stool sample (does not include parents or other household members)
- Child care and early years service providers may obtain a stool sample from individuals who develop symptoms at their facility (home provider or centre) - must acquire verbal or written consent from a parent/guardian/caregiver. Alternatively, stool kits can be sent home with a symptomatic individual for collection at home.
- Call OPH at **613-580-2424, ext. 26325** for stool sample pick-up and delivery to the Public Health Laboratory located in Ottawa
- COVID testing is still highly recommended for symptomatic individuals – this may mean that some people will do both a Rapid Antigen Test as well as a stool sample.

Important Points to Remember:

- Requisition must be completed (including the outbreak number) correctly, or the sample will be rejected by the laboratory.
- Please write the outbreak number on the General Test Requisition form before providing the kit to parents/guardians/caregivers or sending it to the lab (if you do not know the number, please ask your investigator).

- Stool samples must be refrigerated. Refer to [How to collect, store and label stool specimens](#).

Preventing and Controlling Illness

Child care and early years services follow infection control measures as part of their daily operations. During an enteric outbreak, some measures may need to be adjusted or enhanced. These may include:

Ill children and service providers should not attend the child care and early years services

Children and service providers should stay at home when they have:

- Symptoms of an enteric illness, including vomiting and/or diarrhea, and until their symptoms have been resolved for at least 48 hours.
- Symptoms of a respiratory illness, including fever, cough, sore throat, congestion, runny nose, or sneezing until they are fever-free and feeling better without the use of medication for 24 hours.

Isolation of ill children

During an outbreak, service providers should monitor children for symptoms of illness. If possible, ill children should be kept in a separate, supervised area that can be easily cleaned and disinfected, until a parent/guardian/caregiver takes them home.

Cleaning and disinfection

Routine cleaning and disinfection is essential to prevent the spread of germs. During outbreaks, you may need to take additional measures, including, but not limited to, the following:

- Ensure that the disinfectant used during an outbreak is effective to kill Norovirus, a virus which often results in enteric outbreaks.
- Clean and disinfect high touch surfaces at least twice a day.
- Remove sensory play during outbreaks (e.g., water or sand activities, use of playdough).
- Remove shared items such as toys that cannot be easily cleaned and disinfected for the duration of the outbreak.
- Resources: [Cleaning and Disinfection Checklist](#), [Environment Cleaning and Disinfection in Childcare centers and Schools](#).

Hand hygiene

- Hand hygiene is essential for all service providers and children to prevent the spread of infection. Young children should be assisted or supervised (as appropriate) when performing hand hygiene to ensure it is done properly. Hand hygiene includes both hand washing and using alcohol-based hand rub and should be done more frequently during outbreaks. During an enteric outbreak, soap and water is preferable to alcohol-based hand rub. [Hand Hygiene Resources](#).

For more information please visit: [OttawaPublicHealth.ca/ChildCareOutbreaks](https://ottawapublichealth.ca/ChildCareOutbreaks)