



Universal Precautions

Faced with concerns about the spread of serious infections, hospitals and health centers have begun using a successful technique that is also appropriate for child care settings. Rather than waiting to find out who is contagious, they treat everyone as a potentially infected person. The name of this infection control method is “universal precautions,” and it gives a set of guidelines to follow when you come into contact with body fluids and wastes that carry germs. It is not a lot of extra work and it really pays off.

Many of us in child care are used to reacting to infections only when we notice the signs or symptoms of illness. We then rely on exclusion policies to control disease. But the germs causing disease have been spreading for days before children appear ill. Illnesses like colds, diarrhea, and skin and eye infections are often contagious 3-10 days before you might notice symptoms. Hepatitis and HIV / AIDS take an even longer period to develop symptoms.

To effectively prevent the spread of communicable disease, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) requires workers who might come into contact with blood and other body fluids to practice the following infection control practices at all times with everyone:

1. Hand washing
2. Use of latex gloves
3. Environmental disinfection
4. Proper disposal of waste materials

OSHA requires a facility plan and annual training of staff members who may be exposed to blood as a condition of their employment. These rules apply only to child care workers who are employees.

