



UNIT-6 Keeping Children Healthy

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Understand the factors that can affect a child's growth and development
- ✓ Detect the potential warning signs of health issues in children
- ✓ Know how to react if a child is sick or suspected to be sick

Unit 6

Keeping Children Healthy

Children's growth and development are aided by good health. Children who are healthy have an easier time learning and progressing to important “next steps” in their development. Keeping young children healthy can be difficult because their immune systems, which help them fight diseases and infections, do not fully develop until they are seven or eight years old. Their immature immune systems put them at a higher risk of contracting illnesses that can stymie their growth and learning.

Immunization is a critical tool for keeping children healthy; it is the most effective way for parents to protect their children from serious infectious diseases and their complications. Doing a quick health check on each child daily is one way to support the health of the children in your care. This routine health check can help you get a sense of their normal appearance and behaviours, making it easier to spot changes when they occur.

Other important ways for you, as a caregiver, to keep children healthy include learning more about common childhood illnesses and when it's necessary to separate sick children from others, as well as following proper medication administration procedures.

Finally, encouraging and modelling healthy eating and exercise habits can help children develop healthy lifestyle habits and avoid obesity and its associated health problems. The health of your children is dependent in part on you, as their caregiver, being informed and prepared.

Procedures:

1. When a child first arrives at your child care facility and the parent(s) is/are still present, perform the Daily Health Check. A Health Check can be repeated as needed throughout the day.
2. Begin by lowering yourself to the child's eye level.
3. Look for illness signs and symptoms:
 - Changes in activity or energy level, listlessness, or difficulty moving
 - Changes in general mood or behaviour
 - Skin changes such as a rash, swelling, bumps, or redness; drainage/discharge from eyes, ears, or open sores
 - Scratching, yanking on a body part, or clutching a body part
 - Vomiting or diarrhoea
4. Pay attention to what the parent(s) has to say about the child or any other family illness. Listen for the child's complaints and/or unusual sounds that might indicate he or she isn't feeling well:

- Wheezing, sneezing, laboured breathing
 - Hoarseness
 - Coughing
 - Constant crying or unusual fussiness
5. Check their skin for any changes that could indicate a fever or dehydration:
- Skin does not spring back when lightly pressed
 - Moistness
 - Unusual warmth
6. Smell for unusual odours that could indicate an underlying disease:
- Unusual urine or bowel movement odours
 - Fruity sweet breath
 - Foul breath
7. Make a note of your findings on the Daily Health Checklist. If you notice any of the symptoms listed above, the child may be sick, and you should take the following steps as needed:
- Decide with the parent(s) on a plan of action to support the child's health early in the day, while the parent(s) is/are still present. If the child must be removed from care, the parent(s) should take the child home and attend to his or her medical needs.
 - If a child becomes ill during the day, inform the child's parent(s) and decide how to care for the child together. To limit their exposure, keep any child who is sick or contagious away from others. Advise the parent(s) that the child's health care provider may need to be consulted before the child can return to child care.
 - If you suspect child abuse or neglect, you must report it to the appropriate authorities.

Exclusion Procedures for Common Childhood Illnesses

Procedures:

1. Perform a health check on children in care using the Checking Children's Health Daily resource.
2. Keep an eye out for signs of illness. Refer to fact sheets on common childhood illnesses for more information.
3. If symptoms of illness are present, determine whether the illness:
 - Prevents the child from fully participating in activities
 - Requires more care than you can provide without jeopardizing the health and safety of other children or yourself
 - Poses a risk of disease transmission to others

Regardless of the type of illness, if any of the above criteria are met, the child should be separated from the other children in care.

4. Place the child in a clean, safe environment that is within your sight or hearing range until the parent(s) arrives.
5. Inform the child's parent(s) of any illness symptoms and adhere to your health policies (e.g., ask them to come and pick up the child).
6. When the child's parent(s) arrives, inform them that the child's health care provider may be required before the child can return to child care. Provide a written communication to the parent(s) that can be given to the child's health care provider if necessary.

The communication should include the onset of symptoms, observations of the child, vital signs and times (e.g., temperature 38.6°C at 10:30 AM), and any actions taken and when they were taken.

7. Make sure that all of the child's surfaces, equipment, and toys have been cleaned and disinfected before allowing others to use them.

Medication Administration

Procedures:

1. Before administering medication, make the following checks:
 - Make sure the parent(s) has signed the Consent for Medication Administration Form.
 - Verify the accuracy of all information on the consent form.
 - Store medications in a secure location away from children's reach.
 - Thoroughly wash your hands
 - When applying topical medications or eye and ear drops, use latex-free gloves.
 - Double-check that the medication contains the child's name, medication expiration date, time, medication name, dose, and physician's instructions.
 - Give the child the medication as directed.
2. Following the administration of medication:
 - Keep track of when and how much medication was given, as well as the time and date.
 - Store medications in a secure location away from children's reach.
 - Thoroughly wash your hands.
 - Monitor the child's reaction to the medication. If the child has a reaction to the medication, document the reaction and call/inform the child's parent(s) as soon as possible, as well as calling an emergency helpline if necessary.

Physical Activity and Nutrition

Procedures:

1. Use infant feeding techniques that are both positive and supportive.
 - Encourage exclusive breastfeeding until the age of six months, and use proper bottle-feeding techniques with breast milk or iron-fortified infant formula.
2. Only serve foods and beverages that are good for you.
 - Avoid sugar, salt, and preservatives in foods and beverages.
3. Encourage all children, including infants and children with special needs, to engage in daily physical activity through active play.
4. Limit screen time (television, computers, video games, smartphones/tablets, etc.).
 - Children under the age of two should have very limited or no screen time, and when they do, it should be used for high-quality interaction, education, or physical activity.
 - When eating or snacking, stay away from screens.
5. Provide nutrition education opportunities throughout the day, including at meal and snack times.
 - Promote healthy eating habits. Avoid advertising for unhealthy foods in marketing and branded educational materials.
 - Encourage children to participate in hands-on activities like food preparation, gardening, taste testing, and farm visits.
 - Provide opportunities for infants to move, such as tummy time, bouncing, rolling over, kicking, and crawling. Spending time in restricted seating or swings should be limited to short periods of time or avoided entirely.
 - Toddlers should be allowed 60–90 minutes of moderate to vigorous active play per 8-hour day.
 - Pre-schoolers should have 90–120 minutes of moderate to vigorous active play per 8-hour day.
 - Indoor and outdoor active play, as well as planned (i.e. structured) and free play, are all examples of active play.
 - Sleep deprivation has been linked to unhealthy weight gain, so schedule quiet periods for sleep or rest.
6. Encourage families to support healthy lifestyles that are culturally and ethnically diverse.
 - Collaborate on the development of nutrition and physical activity plans and policies with the parent(s).

- When planning meals, keep in mind the child's abilities, preferences, and cultural background.
- Provide healthy living guides and resources to families on a regular basis.

Further Reading:

- ✓ *Introducing Child Psychology: A Practical Guide, (2011), By Kairen Cullen*
- ✓ *Keeping Kids Safe, Healthy, and Smart by Kimberly Williams (Author), Marcel Lebrun (Author), David Hyerle*