



DIARRHEA (Infectious Diarrhea)

Diarrhea is defined as: 1) an increase in the number of stools over what is normal for that person, and 2) stools which are not formed (i.e., loose and watery and take the shape of the container they are in). (NOTE: Breast-fed babies may have stools that are **normally** not formed).

There are two (2) general types of diarrhea: infectious and non-infectious.

Infectious Diarrhea is caused by a virus, parasite, or bacterium. It can spread quickly from person-to-person, especially in daycare centers. Some of the causes of infectious diarrhea, such as Campylobacteriosis, shiga-toxin producing E. coli, giardiasis, salmonellosis and shigellosis, are discussed in their own fact sheets found in this document. There are other agents that can also cause infectious diarrhea in children. These include parasites (e.g., cryptosporidiosis, amoeba) other bacterial (e.g., yersinia) and other viruses (e.g., Rotavirus). Although these other disease-causing organisms are not discussed in detail, the general principles outlined in this section are applicable to prevent the spread of any of these germs.

Non-infectious Diarrhea can be caused by toxins (e.g., certain types of food poisoning), chronic diseases (e.g., cystic fibrosis) or antibiotics (e.g., ampicillin). Non-infectious diarrhea **DOES NOT** spread from person-to-person.

Who gets it?

Anyone can catch infectious diarrhea. It can spread especially quickly among babies and young children who are not toilet-trained or who may not wash their hands well after going to the bathroom. It can also easily spread to the adults taking care of them and helping them with diapering and toileting.

How is it spread?

The germs that can cause infectious diarrhea are spread by fecal-oral route.

How is it diagnosed and treated?

The germs can be diagnosed by stool cultures or by looking at stool under a microscope for eggs or parasites. (The healthcare provider will ask for a stool sample and send it to a laboratory for analysis). The physician will decide on appropriate treatment.

How can the spread of diarrhea be prevented?

Hand washing is the most important way to stop the spread. Specific methods for preventing the spread of infectious diarrhea are discussed in each fact sheet.

Who should be excluded?

Staff and children who have non-specific diarrhea should be excluded until symptoms resolve. For diarrhea caused by a specific agent, see the related fact sheet to learn if exclusion is necessary.

Reportable?

Non-specific diarrhea is not reportable. Clusters of diarrhea illness in a facility should be reported to the Division of Public Health Services, Communicable Disease Control Section at (603) 271-4496 or 800-852-3345 ext. 4496.