



LEWIS & CLARK CITY-COUNTY
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FACT SHEET
Disease Prevention
for Parents and Childcare Providers

Infants and Toddlers

When it comes to disease, children are considered a high-risk or “highly susceptible population”. This means that children get sick more often and more easily than adults. Infants and toddlers carry the highest risk of all children.

Infants and Toddlers

Special considerations should be used with infants and toddlers because they:

- Often have a higher death rate from diseases as compared to older children and adults.
- Are more inclined to develop complications or severe illness from common illnesses.
- Have immature, developing immune systems.
- Have no resistance to diseases because their immune system has not “seen” many germs (a baby’s immune system has to learn how to recognize and fight germs).
- May get sick from a smaller dose of germs.
- Engage in some high risk behaviors such as putting their hands or objects in their mouth.
- Are often not fully vaccinated because of their young age.
- Don’t know what disease is and are entirely dependent upon the caregiver to protect them from it.

Disease Prevention

The good news is that there are many things that caregivers can do to help protect infants and toddlers from disease. The first thing to do is to be knowledgeable about how and where infants and toddlers acquire disease. Since most common diseases are acquired from other people, practice the following:

- Have everyone in your home or daycare cover their mouth or nose if they cough or sneeze.
- Have everyone in your home or daycare wash their hands after touching their mouth or nose, after blowing their nose, after coughing into their hand, after using the bathroom, after playing with animals, after being outside, before eating, before handling food, and before touching an infant’s face, hands, or toys.
- Keep infants and toddlers away from sick people as much as possible.
- Create a “protective bubble” around infants and encourage people to interact with the infant without touching his or her face, hands, or toys unless the person has just washed their hands.
- Limit toy use to one infant or toddler or wash toys between uses.

Over⇒

- Provide space between children's beds to reduce airborne transmission. Do not share bedding between children.
- Keep the infant or toddler and all household members and close contacts up to date on immunizations. A flu shot is recommended for all infants six months or older and all caregivers or contacts of infants who are under six months.
- Support breastfeeding; it may help an infant resist disease.
- Keep surfaces clean, especially those that infants play on and those that caregivers touch.
- In the U.S., the highest incidence of disease associated with raw meat and eggs is in babies. These diseases can be very serious in young children, sometimes causing death or very severe illness with lifelong effects. Be careful when handling raw meat and eggs, even packaged products. Keep these products separate from all other food during shopping, storage, and handling. Wash hands *immediately after* touching these foods and *before* touching anything else, including other utensils, cabinet doors, refrigerator doors, dishes, and the telephone. Do not cross contaminate.
- Do not serve the following foods to infants and toddlers:
 - Honey (child's doctor can determine appropriate age for consumption).
 - Raw eggs in cookie dough or ice cream (use pasteurized raw eggs, available at the grocery store- these have been heat treated to kill germs).
 - Undercooked meat and eggs. Cook meat and eggs thoroughly.
 - Raw milk products.
 - Unpasteurized fruit juice.
 - Home canned food, except jams and jellies.
 - Sprouts.

All of these food products are considered high risk for foodborne illness or are a special risk to young children.

- Keep the refrigerator at 41°F and use up infant/toddler foods and milk within two or three days after opening. Always keep infant foods and milk refrigerated; do not leave them out at room temperature once they are opened.
- Clean food contact surfaces thoroughly, keep the refrigerator clean, and clean baby bottles with lots of hot soapy water and appropriate bottle brushes. Infants are at risk for listeriosis, an often deadly disease caused by a bacteria that may grow on certain foods and on food residues even at refrigeration temperatures, thus it is important to keep things clean and use a short shelf life for infant/toddler foods and milk.

No one wants their child to be sick. Just remember, with a few extra precautions, we really can reduce the incidence of disease in our infants, toddlers, and children. Make hand washing in your home or daycare fun and easy, and wash those germs away!

Please contact the Health Department at (406)447-8352 with any questions that you may have.