

Medical Officer of Health Environmental Health ADVICE

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Introduction

This edition of EH Advice focuses on children's health and safety. We remind early childhood education centres of basic measures to prevent injury and disease and provide sources of further information. We advise on basic hygiene measures to prevent the transmission of infections to children during contact with farm animals.

The Environmental Health Team has developed a flipchart to help prevent disease outbreaks and to avoid other hygiene-related illnesses occurring at public and school swimming pools.

Free poison advice 0800 POISON

A partnership between ACC and the National Poisons Centre has resulted in a 24 hour toll free helpline providing access to the services of the National Poisons Centre. The centre can provide advice on:

- ▶ How to safely store and handle poisons in the workplace.
- ▶ How to safely store and handle poisons in the home.
- ▶ How to keep children safe from poisons.
- ▶ What to do if poisoning or suspected poisoning occurs.
- ▶ How to identify poisonous plants.

For poison advice, call 0800 POISON (0800 764 766).

Health and Safety in Early Childhood Education Centres

Public Health Protection assesses the health and safety aspects of early childhood education centres on the behalf of the Ministry of Education.

Hand-washing and hand-drying facilities

Handwashing and hand-drying are essential to stop the spread of disease.

Handwashing and hygienic hand-drying facilities are needed so that both children and staff/parents can wash and dry their hands thoroughly:

- ▶ After going to the toilet/nappy changing
- ▶ Before eating
- ▶ Before handling food or food utensils
- ▶ After handling raw food (in the kitchen)
- ▶ After handling pets or other animals
- ▶ After blowing their nose
- ▶ After arts and crafts

Warm water should be supplied to basins at 30-40°C to help dissolve dirt and germs, avoid scalding young skin, and to encourage children to spend longer washing their hands (warm water is more comfortable for children).

Soap (preferably liquid soap from a wall-mounted dispenser) should also be supplied.

Hands should be dried thoroughly, as this has been found to be just as important as washing. Paper towels have been found to be the most effective means of hand-drying. Some suppliers provide wall-mounted dispensers free of charge.

One basin or sink in the kitchen must be equipped with soap, a nailbrush and a hygienic means of hand-drying (such as paper towels), and should be used only for handwashing. It is important food handlers can wash and dry their hands (especially after handling raw food) without risk of contaminating food, dishes or other food utensils.

Sleeping Facilities

Sleeping facilities for children must be safe, hygienic and well-ventilated, to protect children from injury and to minimise spread of infectious disease.

A new addition to the information pack (sent on request to licensees) is more detailed guidance about sleeping facilities, including the health issues associated with using multi-cots (cots stacked like bunks).

Bark as a Safefall Surface

Play equipment above 0.5m needs to be on loose fill or on a synthetic safety surface with a clearance of 1.9m fall space around equipment (Developing Playgrounds in Early Childhood Environments, Early Childhood Development and Hutt Valley District Health Board, www.ecd.govt.nz). You should also consider placing a safefall surface in other areas where children could fall over 0.5m (e.g. from fences, down very steep banks etc.).

Bark is widely used as a safefall surface.

Some points to note:

- ▶ The bark should be checked for animal faeces, glass and buried objects each morning. It should also be redistributed to meet the minimum depth needed to provide a safefall

around and under each item of play equipment (or other areas from which children could fall from a height of over 0.5m). At the time of writing, 200mm is thought to be of sufficient depth to prevent serious injury.

- ▶ Bark must be added whenever necessary to ensure it is always of sufficient depth to prevent serious injury.

- ▶ ECD recommend that new playgrounds be constructed with an initial depth of 250-300mm of bark chips. (This allows for settling.)
- ▶ The bark should not include fine material or splinters.
- ▶ Bark chips last a maximum of 2 years but this depends on the quality of the bark chips. Grade 4 (25-50mm size) is less likely to break down as quickly.

Sources of information for early childhood education centres

To obtain up-to-date information about health and safety requirements for licensed early childhood education centres, please contact Megan Owen or Debbie Hill, Health Protection Officers, Auckland District Health Board (phone 09 262 1855) for an information pack.

Included in the information pack will be the booklet Assessment Information for Early Childhood Centres 1999. This booklet represents the minimum health and safety standards for early childhood education centres licensed by Public Health Protection.

Also included is a health and safety questionnaire, which we suggest you copy for future reference. We recommend that childcare centres perform their own health and safety checks regularly.

Further health information and resources are available from your local office of Public Health Promotion, Auckland District Health Board:

North Shore

9 Huron Street
Private Bag 93502
Takapuna
Ph: 488 2310

Central

615 New North Rd
PO Box 41200
Kingsland
Ph: 845 0955

West Office

22 Moselle Ave
Henderson
Ph: 836 6370

South Office

Floor 2, Leyton House
Leyton Way
Manukau
Ph: 262 1856

You can also visit our website and download our publications and fact sheets at www.akphp.co.nz, or the Ministry of Health websites www.health.govt.nz and www.moh.govt.nz.

There are also numerous organisations promoting child safety which have useful health and safety resources, including:

- ▶ Safekids Information and Resource Centre (phone 09 820 1193)
- ▶ Child Safety Foundation (phone 0800 CHILDSAFETY, www.childsafety.co.nz)
- ▶ Plunket (see your White Pages)
- ▶ Ministry of Consumer Affairs (phone 09 570 9753)
- ▶ Your local council:
 - Environmental Health Officers (food safety, pest control, noise, health nuisances, other environmental health issues)
 - Building Inspectors

For centres in the Waitakere City area:

- ▶ Safer Waitakere, Waitakere City Council - child safety, including planning guidelines for childcare centres and maps of water hazards near your centre, Margaret Devlin phone 836 8000, ext. 8540
- ▶ Occupational Safety and Health (West Auckland phone 833 5651) - safety at the workplace

(All health promotion offices are open 8:30am - 4:30pm, weekdays only.)

Farm and Zoo Visits

Farm and zoo visits are educational and fun. They provide children with the opportunity to see and touch animals that they may not usually see. However, care needs to be taken to ensure children's health and safety. All animals carry a range of micro-organisms that may be transmitted to humans causing disease. The types of infections that may be transmitted from animals to humans include gastrointestinal, skin and respiratory infections, flu-like illnesses and infections of unborn babies (e.g. Listeriosis). Internationally, several outbreaks of VTEC (Verotoxigenic Escherichia coli O157), a potentially life threatening organism, have been associated with petting zoos. Several recent cases of cryptosporidiosis and giardia in Auckland children have been associated with handling farm animals. The risk of infection can be reduced by good hygiene practices and supervision.

Bacteria, viruses, fungi and parasites can be transmitted from animals to people by:

- ▶ direct contact with animals and through bites and scratches
- ▶ indirect contact through urine, faeces, secretions or objects contaminated with these materials.



Children should be discouraged from kissing the animals. They should also be discouraged from touching their faces or putting anything in their mouths (including fingers and thumbs). Cuts and grazes on children's hands should be covered with waterproof dressings. There should be a designated eating area away from animals and close to handwashing facilities. Children should not be allowed to consume unpasteurised milk.

Children and supervising adults should wash their hands with soap and water.

- ▶ after handling animals
- ▶ before eating
- ▶ after handling anything with droppings on them (e.g. shoes)
- ▶ after using the toilet
- ▶ when they leave the farm

If anyone becomes ill after the visit (e.g. vomiting or diarrhoea), advise their caregiver to take them to the doctor and explain that they have had recent contact with animals.

Short Notes

▶ Annual Drinking Water Survey

Public Health Protection is currently contacting all water suppliers (private and public) in the Auckland region to gather information on their microbiological and chemical compliance with the Drinking Water Standards for New Zealand. This annual survey has been undertaken for a number of years. This year there has been a name change resulting from the inclusion of chemical compliance. Previously the survey was known as the Annual Microbiological Survey. It is a national survey compiled by ESR on behalf of the Ministry of Health.

▶ Transfer of fumigants to controls under HSNO

Fumigation operators are advised that ERMA NZ will be transferring fumigants to controls under the Hazardous Substances and New Organisms Act 1996 late in 2002. Industry will have the opportunity to comment on a public discussion document regarding proposed controls. The Ministry of Health advises that the Fumigation Regulations 1967 will be revoked as part of this process. For further information contact ERMA NZ phone 04 473 8246 or www.ermanz.govt.nz.

In the interim fumigation operators are reminded to ensure that they comply with the Fumigation Regulations 1967 and the Health and Safety in Employment Act 1992.

▶ Cryptosporidiosis Flipcharts for Public and School Swimming Pools

The Environmental Health Team has developed a flipchart to help prevent disease outbreaks and to avoid other hygiene-related illnesses occurring at public and school swimming pools. The flipchart contains guidelines for swimming pool hygiene, a standard procedure for handling a faecal accident and a cryptosporidiosis fact sheet. It is designed to be displayed in swimming pool entrance areas and on notice boards in public gathering places, in school classrooms, staff rooms and libraries.

For copies of the flipchart please contact Leslie Breach phone (09) 262 1855

▶ Prevention of tooth decay:

School dental data (Regional Dental Services, Waitemata District Health Board) shows that tooth decay continues to be a public health problem for New Zealand children. The number of people (adults and children) on waiting lists for complex dental care is increasing. Here are some tips on how to prevent tooth decay in your own workplace, and/or for you and your family:

- ▶ Brush twice a day with a smear of fluoride toothpaste (and help your children do the same).
- ▶ Give your children milk and water to drink. Lots of water should be added to fruit juice. Cordial and fizzy drinks are bad for your teeth.
- ▶ Don't put your child to bed with a bottle.
- ▶ Give cheese, fresh fruit and vegetables for snacks instead of lollies and fruit bars.
- ▶ Keep your own teeth healthy - as dental decay is infectious and can be passed around the family.
- ▶ Take your children to the school dental clinic as soon as their teeth start to show (from one year old) - this service is free!

Water fluoridation is an important strategy that helps to prevent tooth decay. It is safe, and cost effective. For more information on water fluoridation see our website www.akphp.co.nz.

Call your local council to find out if your water supply is fluoridated. If you live in an area that does not have a reticulated water supply (tank, roof or stream water) you can obtain information on fluoride tablets from your local dental therapist or phone Public Health Protection on (09) 262-1855 ext 5771.



Sarah Pitches

Sarah is a Health Protection Officer who joined the Environmental Health team in 2001. Prior to this, she was a Health Protection Officer in Hawkes Bay for two years. During her time in the Hawkes Bay, Sarah worked in all areas of Health Protection. Since joining Public Health Protection, Sarah has mainly been involved in the areas of drinking water and disease outbreak investigation. Sarah is currently studying towards a Diploma in Drinking Water Assessing.