



DIARRHEA FACT SHEET

Diarrhea is the passage of loose or watery stools or the increase in stool frequency. When this occurs and persists within 14 days, it is termed “Acute Diarrhea”.

Mild, Acute Diarrhea is often caused by:

- A change in dietary habits, such as eating rich or different foods
- Food allergies
- Taking medicines, such as antibiotics

Serious, Acute Diarrhea is more likely to be an infection and can be caused by a variety of germs: viruses, bacteria and parasites.

How is infectious diarrhea spread to other children and adults?

1. When bowel movements of an infected child come into contact with a non-infected person’s mouth (from contaminated hands or contaminated surface, like a changing table).
2. By eating contaminated food.
3. Oral contact with water (like swimming pools) when the water is contaminated.
4. Trips to sites with animals (e.g., farms, pet stores, petting zoos, homes with pet turtles) also can lead to contact with germs that cause diarrhea.

What should parents and staff watch for?

- Dehydration is the biggest worry with diarrhea. This is especially true when there is also vomiting. Make sure children receive enough fluids. Always seek immediate medical care when a child shows signs of dehydration.
- Signs of dehydration are any one of the following: decrease in urination, sunken eyes, no tears when crying, extreme thirst, unusual drowsiness or fussiness, or dry, sticky mouth and cracked lips. Always check for these when a child has diarrhea.
- Inform a doctor if: there is blood in stools, if a child seems very ill, child is young (< 6 months), or there is prolonged vomiting.
- Call district’s Nursing & Wellness Office about calling Public Health if more than 2 people in a group have diarrhea.

Coming to school: Exclude students with diarrhea if they are still diapered or stool cannot be contained, if there is blood or mucous in stool, if signs of dehydration, or if accompanied by fever, jaundice, or behavior change.