

Ideas and practices



suggested by childcare services as part of their pandemic service continuity plans

In 2007, the Ministère de la Famille et des Aînés asked all childcare centres and day care centres to prepare a service continuity plan in the event of an influenza pandemic.

An analysis of the service continuity plans prepared by childcare centres and day care centres has made it possible to make a list of tangible and effective approaches to notably promote the awareness of children and inform parents and staff members about the ways and means of preventing the spread of the virus. The Department considers it advisable to inform all childcare services of these ways and means, particularly within the current context of the influenza A(H1N1) pandemic.

Following the declaration of a pandemic by medical authorities, all childcare services must increase their

vigilance to the maximum level and greatly reinforce the prevention measures recommended by these authorities, such as washing hands and respiratory hygiene. This document also incorporates these recommendations.

Through the dissemination of these approaches and due to the current pandemic context, the Department wishes to encourage childcare services that have already put in place a plan to reinforce it and to provide support to those services that are in the process of completing the development of their plan. It is important to recall that for the preparation or the updating of their plan, childcare services must refer to the *Guide for preparing a service continuity plan in the event of an influenza pandemic: childcare centre and day care centre (facility)* available on the Department's web site.

PART 1 – ACTIVITIES THAT SHOULD BE CARRIED OUT AT ALL TIMES

Washing hands

This practice is the most important that you can implement for prevention purposes to reduce the spread of the influenza virus and several other infections.

- Teach children an appropriate hand washing technique and show them how germs found on the hands can spread quickly.

To help you with this task, you can make a demonstration using a "blue-tinged light"¹, which reveals spots that are often forgotten when washing hands, spots that may serve as germ reservoirs and promote their transmission to other persons. You can also carry out this activity using vegetable oil, vaseline or gouache².

Put some on children's hands and ask them to touch objects so that children understand how germs may be transmitted. Then have children wash their hands at different temperatures (Be careful! Hot water may cause burns), both with and without soap, to show children the best combination for cleaning their hands well. (As no scientific study has been carried out on this subject, it is recommended that you first test the methods to make sure that the result obtained is the one you are looking for).

- Use an hourglass to count with children the time it takes to wash their hands (at least 15 seconds) or have them sing "Happy Birthday" twice.

¹ For more information, consult the article entitled « Des "faux microbes" lumineux! » in the March 1999 edition of the *Bye-bye les microbes!* newsletter, which is available on the web site of the MFA [<http://www2.mfa.gouv.qc.ca/publications/bye-bye-microbes/no21/outils.asp>].

² Ministère de l'Agriculture, des Pêcheries et de l'Alimentation (MAPAQ), *Mes aliments, j'en prends soin*, 2006, p. 6-8. available on the web site of the MAPAQ [http://www.mapaq.gouv.qc.ca/NR/rdonlyres/E6619A22-BE11-4FDF-8139-3EFFB9FD1016/0/trousse_pedagogique.pdf].



- Make sure that children wash their hands after coughing or sneezing, blowing their nose, before meals and snacks, after going to the washroom, upon returning from outside and after every messy activity.
- Prepare stories on the spread of germs and the importance of washing hands, and tell these stories to the children.

- Do theme-based activities with children to promote washing hands.
- With the participation of children, make posters on the subject of washing hands.
- Invite nursing students or students studying early childhood education techniques to organize activities to be carried out with children.
- Post a reminder in the childcare service's newsletter to promote awareness about the importance of washing hands.
- Do a follow-up on the hand washing method at a pedagogical meeting.
- Include hand-washing techniques in the introductory training intended for new childcare workers.
- Post and promote the publication *Off with germs! Lather up!*³.
- Inform and promote the awareness of parents about these measures so that parents also apply them at home.

Respiratory hygiene

Respiratory hygiene focuses on simple steps that should be taken when a person coughs or sneezes to prevent the spread of viruses.

- Carry out theme-based activities on the reasons justifying the recommendation to cough or sneeze in the fold of the elbow or in the upper arm when facial tissues are not readily available.

- Invite nursing students or students studying early childhood education techniques to organize activities to be carried out with children.
- Inform and promote the awareness of parents about these measures so that they also apply them at home.
- Post and promote the publication *Atchooo! Hey germs, no hands! Off you go to the garbage can!*⁴.

Wearing a mask

According to public health authorities, the wearing of a procedure mask is a prevention measure that is only intended for staff in charge of keeping a watch over children with flu-like symptoms (fever and cough accompanied by headache, fatigue, aches and pains, or intense fatigue, etc.), until they return home.

Without emphasizing to children that staff members could wear a mask in a pandemic situation, you can carry out activities with masks so that children grow accustomed to this object and reduce the likelihood of them becoming afraid if masks are worn.

- Put the masks in the dramatic play corner.
- Use procedure masks during play activities (disguises, role playing).
- Hold a special activity "Today, everyone will wear a paper mask".
- Hold a mask decoration activity.
- Use a play or a theme-based activity to explain to children the reasons for wearing a mask (by a nurse or a doctor, for example).
- Post photos of people wearing a mask.
- Draw smiles on the masks.



³ Ministère de la Famille et des Aînés, 2007.

⁴ Ministère de la Famille et des Aînés, 2006.

Vaccination

Vaccination is an effective means to protect oneself against seasonal influenza because it enables the immune system to defend against the virus.

- Post the seasonal influenza vaccination schedule in the staff room and facilitate the taking of appointments by employees interested in getting a flu shot. Childcare centre staff will receive the vaccination free of charge upon presentation of proof of employment.
- Get in touch with the CSSS (CLSC section) and agree on the conditions for obtaining a seasonal influenza vaccination for children, parents and staff wishing to get a flu shot.
- Publish a reminder of the influenza vaccination dates in the childcare service's newsletter.
- Offer parents the possibility of updating the vaccination in their child's file.
- Discuss with the board of directors of the childcare centre or the manager of the day care centre the possibility of offering the vaccination in the workplace for childcare and day care staff.

Cleaning of surfaces

It is possible to limit the spread of viruses by cleaning the workplace frequently.

- Adopt a housekeeping and disinfection procedure for the premises (daily, weekly and monthly tasks). This procedure will involve the use of customary cleaning products.
- Add the disinfection of door handles and light switches to the routine disinfection of tables and chairs.

Cleaning of toys

The spread of viruses may be limited through the frequent cleaning of toys, which are major virus transmission vectors.

- Favour the purchase of dishwasher-resistant plastic toys.

- Make a list of the toys that have been cleaned to ensure a better follow-up.
- Pay special attention to toys that children can put in their mouth.
- Make the toy disinfection policy available and include it in the binder intended for replacement employees.
- Purchase an industrial dishwasher, which will ensure a faster and more thorough cleaning.
- Make sure that toys are cleaned frequently according to the recommendations.

Management of sick children

For prevention purposes, it is important to manage the presence at the childcare or day care centre of persons with flu-like symptoms (for example, fever and coughing with headache, extreme fatigue, or aches and pains).

- Adopt the protocol for receiving and managing the presence of sick children of the CSSS (CLSC section) of your territory.
- Make parents aware of the importance of keeping a sick child at home, **especially when the child has flu-like symptoms (fever and cough accompanied by headache, fatigue, aches and pains or extreme fatigue, etc.)**, and arrange for an alternative solution if the child cannot attend the childcare service (grandparents, neighbour, friend, other member of the family, etc.).
- Post in a conspicuous location the chart of infectious diseases, the rules of exclusion and the register of reportable diseases. Give copies of these documents to parents.
- Post the description of the symptoms associated with the influenza A(H1N1) virus and ask parents to take action when in doubt.
- Ask parents to make sure that someone will be able to quickly pick up the child at the childcare service if the child becomes sick and needs to be sent home.
- At all times, keep a register of sick children whose infection was reported to the CSSS (CLSC section).

- Keep a register of sick children (presence of fever along with at least one flu or respiratory symptom) and see to the appropriate follow-up with parents.
- Include the policy for excluding sick children in the service continuity plan, post it in the staff room and give parents a copy.
- Discuss on a regular basis at employee meetings the steps that should be taken before excluding a sick child.
- Request the collaboration of parents in applying the prevention measures at home.
- Disinfect the washrooms intended for children several times a day.
- Employ paper or a clean piqué cloth for each child when using the dressing table.

Other practices put in place

Other practices may help limit the transmission of infections and viruses.

- Promote the awareness of the entire staff of the facility, including kitchen employees, about the measures for preventing the transmission of infections.
- Give all staff members the document entitled *La prévention des infections chez les personnes travaillant en service de garde à l'enfance, y compris les stagiaires*⁵.
- Review the procedure for brushing teeth and for storing toothbrushes.
- On a daily basis, set aside a period when children are outside to open the windows to air the rooms.
- Make sure that your staff replacement plans respect child/childcare worker ratios for health and safety reasons.
- Reach agreements to share human resources between the childcare and day care services of your territory.
- Do a survey with your staff to determine who, in the event of a pandemic, would be available for work. This survey should be done prior to a pandemic and redone periodically.

Replacement staff and human resources

According to public health authorities, the staff absenteeism rate could reach 35% in a pandemic situation. Given such a rate, staff replacement planning is a must and various replacement options should be envisaged in order to have the required labour force to maintain essential services⁶.

Notes

⁵ [http://www.mfa.gouv.qc.ca/fr/publication/Documents/SG_prevention_infection.pdf].

⁶ *Guide for preparing a service continuity plan in the event of an influenza pandemic: childcare centre and day care centre (facility)*, p. 22-29 [<http://www.mfa.gouv.qc.ca/fr/servicesde-garde/cpe-garderies/gestion-sg/situationsurgence/Pages/index.aspx#pandemie>].

PART 2 – MEASURES THAT SHOULD BE APPLIED WHEN A PANDEMIC IS DECLARED BY PUBLIC HEALTH AUTHORITIES

This section presents the measures planned by childcare services in preparation for pandemic situations, *such as the one recently declared following the appearance of the influenza A(H1N1) virus*. These measures can supplement those already listed in a service continuity plan and those indicated in the *Guide for preparing a service continuity plan in the event of an influenza pandemic: childcare centre and day care centre (facility)*.

Washing hands **In a pandemic period**

In a pandemic period, it is necessary to reinforce the measures taken for prevention purposes.

- See to it that all parents, staff members and children wash their hands upon arriving at and leaving the childcare service.
- Install an alcohol-based (at least 60%) antiseptic gel dispenser at the entrance to the childcare service for parents and visitors.
- Evaluate and review, if necessary, the effectiveness of the planned measures.

Respiratory hygiene **In a pandemic period**

In a pandemic period, it is important to step up hygiene practices (washing hands and respiratory hygiene).

- Make sure that childcare workers wash their hands after helping a child to blow his nose.
- Plan to have an alcohol-based hand rinse that is readily available to childcare workers to facilitate and promote frequent hand hygiene.
- See to it that children wash their hands often, in particular after blowing their nose.
- Encourage children to use the bend of their elbow or their upper arm to cough and sneeze.



Reduction of contacts

In a pandemic and sustained virulence period

In a pandemic and sustained virulence situation, the reinforcement of prevention measures could take the form of a further reduction of contacts despite the difficulty that this poses in a childcare service.

- Place children at least one metre apart for activities during which they will not be called upon to move about (for example during the siesta or when a story is being read).
- During the siesta, have children adopt a position where their heads are not facing one another to avoid direct contact with other children's secretions. If children are coughing or sneezing, separate them from the other children.
- Suspend routines involving the handling of objects by several children.
- Cease rotations of rooms and groups.
- Limit contacts by having children play outside as often as possible.
- Limit movements between the various sections of the facility (kitchen, play areas, nursery, etc.).
- Avoid visiting the kitchen for no reason.
- Avoid surprise visits from one room to the next.

- Reduce the time that children spend together when they arrive at and leave the childcare service.
- Place a "Zone reserved for children" sign on the doors of the rooms.
- Limit the access of parents and other visitors to the cloakroom.
- Use signs or memos for parents to reduce conversations with childcare workers at the doorstep, and invite them to telephone or write to the childcare worker.
- Ask parents to limit the number of people who come to pick up their child and to avoid comings and goings during the day.
- Install an alcohol-based hand disinfectant dispenser at the entrance to the childcare service and ask suppliers and parents to use it.
- Limit access to the various rooms.
- Except in the case of heavy objects, ask suppliers to leave goods at the entrance and promote telephone or e-mail contacts with suppliers.
- Air the premises for approximately 30 minutes a day and maintain a humidity rate of 30 to 50%.
- Post at the entrance a sign indicating "Please ring at the administration. A member of the administrative staff will receive you".
- Place bigger orders with suppliers to reduce the frequency of deliveries.
- Temporarily remove the role playing and disguise corner.
- Assign cleaning staff to the systematic disinfection (each day, after the reception period) of horizontal surfaces in contact with hands and surfaces found in traffic areas (door handles, handrails, etc.).
- Set up a disinfection team. Disinfect toys, door handles, children's beds as well as all objects that are frequently touched during the day.
- Ask childcare workers to do an additional disinfection during the siesta, by giving priority to tables, chairs and toys recently used by children.
- When a group leaves a room, use a sprayer (for example the same one as for the routine disinfection, kept out of the reach of children) to disinfect tables, chairs and recently handled toys.

Cleaning and disinfection **In a pandemic period** of toys

In a pandemic period, the disinfection of toys takes on great importance.

- Remove toys that pose the greatest risks, such as disguises, to reduce the risks of infection. Favour plastic toys that can be put in the dishwasher.
- Give each child his or her own play dough so that children will be less likely to trade play dough. It is preferable to wait 24 hours before re-using play dough. Set aside a quantity for the morning and another quantity for the afternoon if this activity takes place twice a day.
- Purchase one net per room, including rooms used when children arrive and leave. As toys get dirty, place them in the net.
- Limit the number of toys in circulation; give preference to individual games.
- Quarantine toys that cannot be cleaned immediately, until such time as they have been cleaned.
- Entrust childcare workers with the responsibility of cleaning the toys in their room.



Cleaning and disinfection **In a pandemic period** of surfaces

In a pandemic period, the cleaning of childcare premises should be even more systematic.

- Disinfect on a daily basis the surfaces that are normally disinfected (door handles, handrails, switches, mattresses used for the siesta, etc.) and disinfect twice a day those objects that are normally disinfected once a day (toilets, sinks, etc.).

Replacement staff and human resources In a pandemic period

In a pandemic period, staff members may become sick or stay at home to take care of a child or a loved one. That is why it is important to be able to resort to replacement workers to ensure essential services and meet needs.

- Cancel gatherings and group meetings.
- Implement the staff replacement plan and the sharing of resources between childcare services (supply and needs) using e-mail communications and according to the terms agreed upon with these services.
- Pay attention to the staff members who are more likely to be affected by the psychosocial repercussions of the pandemic in order to reduce the number of people absent from the workplace.
- If necessary, change the work schedules of childcare workers in order to better distribute resources.



Other practices put in place In a pandemic period

In a pandemic period, other practices may be implemented to limit the spread of the virus.

- Specify to childcare workers that hygiene takes precedence over the autonomy of children.
- Avoid the sharing of food and beverages by children during meals and snacks.
- Allow staff members to leave clothing used at work so that it can be washed on site, thereby avoiding the handling of this clothing at home. Provide for a change of clothing.
- Allow staff members to use the washroom facilities of the childcare service to wash up before leaving work. However, washing hands continues to be the most important measure.
- Ask staff members to wear a smock, which will be washed and changed daily.
- If children wear smocks, they must be washed at the childcare service and changed daily.
- Prepare kits (belt pouch containing a mask, gloves, hand disinfectant, cleaning towelettes) for each staff member and make sure that these kits are available in each room.

Notes

