

Best place for sick children is at home

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The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) recommends that children who are physically unwell be excluded from attending school, preschool and child care centres to minimise disease outbreaks. It also details the exclusion periods which apply for children with particular infectious diseases. These Guidelines also ask that the Public Health Unit be notified whenever a child with an illness necessitating exclusion is presented.



An additional publication, *Staying Healthy in Child Care*, is available from the Australian Government Publishing Service, and contains more detail of each of these diseases.

Educators in childcare services can find it very difficult to inform a parent when a child is not well enough to remain. They empathise only too well with the chain of events such advice will set in motion. Initially, the parent would be concerned that the child is unwell, a doctor's appointment may be necessary, and last, but certainly not the easiest to address, is the parent's responsibility to an employer.

Most parents accept the best place for their child at times like this is at home. They know such occasions are rare and it will not be long before life returns to normal.

From time to time, misunderstandings arise because parents have gathered information about their child's illness from less informed or outdated sources. These are easy to overcome by providing parents with the latest information so that they may make an accurate evaluation.

Occasionally, some parents seem to lack the understanding of the seriousness of placing other children at risk at times such as these. Such parents might make statements like: "He/she got it here" or "It's only a mild case of ..." At times like this, it is difficult for educators because they must adhere to the Guidelines which consider the needs of all children in the service. In the end, it may well mean exclusion – irrespective of the parent's belief that the child is well enough to remain. A written medical opinion that the child is no longer contagious may need to be obtained before the child returns. Thinking parents applaud the protection this stance provides for all children.

Quite aside from a child being kept at home to minimise the spread of illness, an unwell child – able to play quietly with toys at home with one or two siblings – finds it a big ask to interact with other children, share toys, take part in routines and cope with the noise level in a childcare service. Clearly, the best place for a child who is unwell to recover is at home.