

What Head Start Parents Should Know About Enterovirus

What Is Enterovirus?

Enterovirus is a form of severe respiratory illness. Yet, these viruses are different from the flu. Keeping your child up-to-date on their state Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic, and Treatment (EPSDT) schedule may help rule out the flu when your child gets sick.

Reports of enteroviruses are becoming very common. They cause about 10 to 15 million infections in the U.S. each year.

What Are the Signs of Enteroviruses?

Enteroviruses can cause mild to severe respiratory illness, especially in children.

- Mild symptoms may include runny nose, sneezing, coughing, and body and muscle aches.
- Severe symptoms may include wheezing and difficulty breathing.

How Does Enterovirus Spread?

Exposure to the virus may be caused by:

- Close contact with an infected person, such as touching or shaking hands,
- Changing diapers of an infected person
- Drinking water that has the virus in it
- Touching an object or surface that has the virus on it and then touching your eyes, nose, or mouth before washing your hands

Pregnant women who are infected with enterovirus shortly before delivery can pass the virus on to their babies. Mothers who are breastfeeding should talk with their doctor if they are sick or think they may have an infection.

Who Is at Risk?

Anyone can become infected with enteroviruses. However, infants, children, and teenagers are more likely to get infected and become sick. In the U.S., people are more likely to get infected with enteroviruses in the summer and fall.

Most people who become infected with enteroviruses do not get sick, or they have mild symptoms similar to the common cold. However, some people can develop more severe symptoms. Infants and people with weakened immune systems have a greater chance of having these complications.

The virus is particularly hard on children's lungs. Therefore, it is especially important for parents of children previously diagnosed with asthma to:

- Help your child follow his or her asthma action plans
- Take prescribed asthma medications as directed
- Make sure the child's caregivers or teachers are aware of the child's condition, and that they know how to avoid asthma triggers and what to do if the child experiences any symptoms related to asthma

Although no child should be exposed to secondhand smoke, it is especially important to educate parents and caregivers on prohibiting smoking in homes and cars where children with asthma live.

How Is Enterovirus Diagnosed?

If you suspect your child has enterovirus, you should take your child see the doctor.

Should My Child with Enterovirus Be Excluded from Head Start?

Children diagnosed with active enterovirus should remain out of the center until treatment is started and the doctor determines the child is no longer infectious. Your child's Head Start center might ask for a note from your doctor to clear your child to return.

How to Stop the Spread of Enterovirus?

There is no vaccine to protect you from enterovirus infection. Since many infected people do not have symptoms, it is difficult to prevent enteroviruses from spreading. Good hygiene and proper infection control are the best defense. It is best to:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after using the toilet and changing diapers
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick, such as touching and shaking hands,
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces
- Stay home when sick or consult your doctor

How to Talk to Children about Enterovirus

- If children have questions, take time to listen and answer their questions.
- Be honest. Answer questions based on facts and as age-appropriate.
- Speak in a calm tone of voice and use reassuring words.

Where Can I Learn More?

- Check out [Talking with Children: Tips for Caregivers, Parents, and Teachers during Infectious Disease Outbreaks](#)