

# What Head Start Programs Should Know About Enterovirus

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## What Is Enterovirus?

Enterovirus is a form of severe respiratory illness. Yet, these viruses are different from the flu. 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 objects or surfaces that have the virus on them 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 and teachers are aware of the child's condition, and that they know such as touching and shaking hands

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 a child in your facility has enterovirus, you should take the child see the 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 the facts and as age-appropriate.
- Speak in a calm tone of voice and use reassuring words.

## Implications for Head Start Programs

- It is recommended that children and staff with enterovirus only be excluded from the Head Start center until treatment is started and the doctor determines the child or staff member is no longer infectious.
- Staff absences may be the biggest challenge for most Head Start programs. Absences may be related to staff illness or caused by worried employees who fear exposure to enteroviruses in the workplace.
- Programs should review their emergency plans and staff availability to ensure adequate coverage, if needed.
- Remember, enteroviruses are different from the flu. However, programs should assist parents and caregivers in keeping children up-to-date on their state Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic, and Treatment (EPSDT) schedule.

## How Can Programs Limit the Spread of Enterovirus?

There is no vaccine to protect people 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:

- Make sure all children and adults wash their hands often with soap and water, especially after using the toilet and changing diapers
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick,

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such as touching and shaking hands

- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces
- Stay home when sick or consult your physician
- Enforce short-term exclusion policies

## Where Can I Learn More?

- Watch [Managing Infectious Disease in Head Start](#)
- Check out [Talking with Children: Tips for Caregivers, Parents, and Teachers during Infectious Disease Outbreaks](#)
- Help early childhood programs prepare for [communicable disease outbreaks or natural disasters](#)

- Learn more about enterovirus and how to prevent it from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):
  - [Non-Polio Enterovirus](#)
  - [Enterovirus D68 Infographic](#)
  - [Pregnancy and Non-Polio Enterovirus Infection](#)
  - [When and How to Wash Your Hands](#)
  - [Cover Your Cough](#)
- Review these health and safety standards from Caring for Our Children:
  - [Standard 3.1.1 Daily Health Check](#)
  - [Standard 3.2.2.2: Handwashing Procedure](#)
  - [Standard 3.2.3.2: Cough and Sneeze Etiquette](#)
  - [Standard 3.3: Cleaning, Sanitizing, and Disinfecting](#)