

REACH Mass

Vol. 2 Issue 3

Winter 2008 Newsletter

REACH Mass is a three-year project to educate parents of young children and child care providers about appropriate antibiotic use and antibiotic resistance.



The ABCs of Child Care and Winter Illness

Welcome to winter! If you have young children in child care or preschool, you are by now familiar with the changes in daily routine: packing hats, boots, warm clothes for fun in the snow... and hoping your children do not get sick. Most children will get colds during the winter, with many children getting six to eight colds each lasting up to two weeks! It may seem like even a normal child has a cold "all the time."

Winter illnesses can really disrupt your work schedules if your children are too sick to attend child care. You feel pressure to go to work, while child care providers feel pressure to provide the best care with limited staffing, and to protect healthy children from illness as much as possible. **So the question is: what is "too sick" for child care?**

The Centers for Disease Control notes that "Excluding children with mild upper respiratory infections, including colds is of little benefit since viruses are likely to be spread even before symptoms have appeared." Also, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health does *not* recommend excluding children with minor illnesses like colds or ear infections, unless they:

- * Have an oral temperature of 101 or greater; rectal temperature of 102 or greater, accompanied by behavioral changes and other signs of illness.
- * Are too sick to participate comfortably in program activities.
- * Need more care than the staffing level allows.
- * Have unusual lethargy, irritability, persistent crying, difficulty breathing or other signs of possible severe illness.

What about strep throat?

Children with **bacterial** "strep" throat should be kept home from child care or school for 24 hours after antibiotic treatment is begun *and* the child has had a normal temperature for 24 hours.

Can an antibiotic help kids return to school faster?

In most cases, no. It's important to remember that antibiotics are usually *not* helpful in treating common winter illnesses that are caused by **viruses**. These include:

- * coughs associated with colds or bronchitis
- * green nasal discharge, which is normal with viral colds
- * fever caused by colds

And antibiotics *won't* make symptoms go away faster, unless there is a **bacterial** infection like pneumonia or strep throat.

What can help?

Viruses are spread mainly by contact, so frequent washing of children's hands and toys can help. Antibacterial soap is not necessary. Plain old soap and water is effective. And remember... spring is just three months away!

"Antibacterial" Hand Soap and Household Cleaners- Is Ordinary Soap All Washed Up?

Chances are that if you look around your kitchen or bathroom you'll find a lot of household cleaners and soaps labeled "antibacterial." Just what does "antibacterial" mean? Does it work better? Is it safe? **And, most important, do antibacterial products have an effect on the growing problem of antibiotic resistance?**

If something is labeled "antibacterial" it simply means that it includes an ingredient that kills bacteria. In general, two types of bacteria killers are used for household cleaning:

- * **Alcohol, bleach, and peroxide.** These have long been used in household cleaning products. They quickly kill bacteria and then evaporate. It is highly unlikely for bacteria to develop resistance to these ingredients.
- * **Triclosan and triclocarban.** These are newer compounds that have been added to many household cleaning products over the past twenty years. Triclosan has been found in 76% of liquid soaps and triclocarban in 29% of bar soaps. Triclosan and triclocarban kill bacteria over a period of time by leaving long-acting residue on surfaces.

Is it true that antibacterial cleaning products increase antibiotic resistance?

Yes. Evidence suggests that resistance to **triclosan** and **triclocarban** has already appeared, and widespread household use of products with these ingredients will likely increase bacterial resistance. Scientists are concerned that use of these products can help breed bacteria resistant to antibiotics as well.

So, should you use household products with triclosan and triclocarban?

Handwashing with ordinary soap and water and cleaning with non-residue forming products (**alcohols, bleach, peroxides**) are still recommended for general hygiene and household cleaning.

What about alcohol-based hand gels?

Recent research suggests that waterless, alcohol-based hand gels (e.g. Purell) are more effective germ killers than soap because they kill germs very rapidly. They are also convenient and kinder to hands than repeated washings with soap and water. **And** they do not promote resistance since their antibacterial activity is from

alcohol only. **However, alcohol- based hand gels are both poisonous if eaten and flammable and containers should be kept out of reach of children.**

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommends that alcohol-based products should be considered standard

components of hand hygiene for health care workers in hospitals. But the CDC has made no recommendations for non-hospital use. Since alcohol- based hand gels do not remove surface dirt, regular, non-antibacterial soap products should remain your first choice for cleaning at home.

Norwalk Virus is in the News

You may have heard about diarrhea and vomiting on several cruise ships caused by the Norwalk virus. This has been one of the worst seasons of Norwalk virus infection in Massachusetts as well. The Norwalk virus is usually found in nursing homes, hospitals, and rehabilitation centers. Public Health officials now believe that this virus is also spreading through the general public in the state.

Symptoms of Norwalk virus infection include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea and abdominal cramps. Headache and low grade fever may also occur. If you or a family member have any of these symptoms, contact your health care provider as soon as possible. People with this infection usually recover within 2-3 days without serious or long-term effects.

The virus is spread person- to- person and infection most often begins when people don't wash hands after using the toilet. Sometimes it's spread through food when someone who's infected prepares a meal. **Health officials say the single best way to reduce the risk of contracting the virus is to wash hands frequently with soap and water.**

Because Norwalk is a viral infection, antibiotics are not effective in treating it. Treatment should include drinking lots of fluids to prevent dehydration. Other medications and treatments should be avoided unless specifically recommended by your health care provider.