

# REACH Notes

## Recent Developments to Promote Judicious Antibiotic Prescribing

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### Child Care Providers and Antibiotic Overuse: Part of the Problem or Part of the Solution

The number of children in out-of-home child care arrangements continues to increase, posing challenges for promoting judicious antibiotic use. Children in group child care have higher rates of viral infections, as well as episodes of otitis media. In addition to this increased incidence of illness, child care staff are concerned about infectious disease transmission, so may wish to err on the side of exclusion and treatment before children are allowed to return. We, as clinicians, are frequently asked to prescribe antibiotics to expedite return to child care, even when we believe symptoms are viral in origin.

What is less often appreciated, is that children in child care are also at increased risk of carriage of antibiotic resistant organisms. Based on nasopharyngeal swabs of children in pediatric practices in REACH Mass communities, children in group child care were 4 times more likely to harbor penicillin-resistant *S. pneumoniae*. This makes judicious prescribing even more critical for our patients in these settings.

To be sure, there are misconceptions held by directors of child care centers about contagious illness and the appropriate use of antibiotics. 75% of directors of child care centers, for example, believe that green nasal discharge is an indication for antibiotic use. On the other hand, education of these individuals may be an effective way to change their practices as well as educate parents in the community.

- Clear guidelines by the Mass. Department of Public Health exist to educate and guide child care center directors. These stress 1) the importance of judicious antibiotic use, 2) that children should not be excluded for coughs, colds, and viral illnesses. Exclusion is only warranted for those with fever, severe symptoms, or who are too ill to participate.
- REACH Mass has held workshops for over 100 child care center directors and teachers in target communities. We have distributed materials about antibiotic use, exclusion policies, and common misconceptions.
- Attached to this REACH Note is a summary of key aspects of the Mass DPH exclusion policy. We suggest attaching a copy to notes back to child care centers or schools when children are referred for medical "clearance."

In focus groups and surveys, child care center directors express increasing concern about antibiotic use, just as parents do. Providing them with current, accurate information has been a goal of the REACH Mass project, and they have been wonderfully receptive to these efforts. Accurate information coming directly from you will further reinforce key messages. Over time, we hope that child care centers will increasingly be promoters of judicious antibiotic prescribing.