

Healthy Young Children

A Manual for Programs

2002 Edition

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Some of the information in this manual applies to specific conditions of individual children. It is not a substitute for the advice of a child's clinician or a program's health consultant. The manual reflects current research and standards in the fields of health and early childhood education. However, in such rapidly changing fields, new information constantly emerges. Be alert to such changes and check with your local department of public health for the most current recommendations.

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Chapter 1

This Manual and the Child Care Health Component

As program directors, teachers, students learning to be teachers, or other professionals working with child care facilities, you must be able to protect and promote the health and well-being of the young children, staff, and families in child care. You can achieve major health gains by taking simple steps. Washing hands, for example, is the single best defense against the spread of infectious disease. Including toothbrushing in the daily routine teaches children a good habit for life. Frequent site safety checks can prevent an injury. Careful, regular observations of children may reveal health problems that can respond to early treatment. Specific information, procedures, and recommendations on each of these topics, as well as on many others, are provided in this manual.

About This Manual

This manual, based on national standards, has been reviewed by both health and early childhood professionals. Child care providers and health professionals who work together can use this manual as a guide to implement currently accepted standards for health policies and practices. The standards are practices for which good evidence exists that failure to perform

Major Concepts

- Young children need warm, positive, continuous relationships for healthy brain development—the core of service in quality child care.
- The role of early childhood educators working in group care programs (center- and home-based) includes prevention of harm to children from known risks as well as promotion of children’s health through medical, nutrition, oral health, and mental health practices.
- The highest risks of physical harm to children in group care settings are from injury and infectious disease.
- The health component of a child care program must be carefully planned and carried out through comprehensive health policies and procedures developed from up-to-date information supplemented by use of community resources.
- All staff and families must understand and work on implementing the child care program’s health policies.
- The experiences of children and families in a child care program can lay the foundation for future personal health practices.

the practice poses an unacceptable risk of harm to the health of children and staff. If you find it impossible to meet some of the standards in your program, implement as many as possible. Assess your priorities for avoiding significant risks; don’t expect to change everything overnight. Plan carefully and thoroughly before making any changes.

Some recommendations in *Healthy Young Children* may differ from materials from other credible sources. Materials are published and updated in different time periods, drawing on a changing base of information. Also, within the medical and scientific community, experts differ on specific approaches. When there is a conflict, seek the *rationale* for the



recommendations. Sometimes the different approaches are equally acceptable alternatives. Other times, you will have to make the best decision you can after exploring the basis for the differing points of view. If the issue involves technical information, you may want to consult a trusted local expert with the appropriate scientific background. Your state or local department of public health can usually provide guidance or suggest where to get the help you need.

Healthy Young Children can be used as a textbook and a guide. When other publications would be particularly helpful on a topic, they are mentioned. To use *Healthy Young Children* effectively, read it through at least one time so you become familiar with the contents and grasp the scope of what you need to do to ensure a safe and healthy child care program. If you are using the manual as a textbook, address the chapters in convenient units, noting that each chapter ends with a list of suggested activities that may help adult learners apply the concepts to real world experience.

The Purpose of the Child Care Health Component

Research shows that development of the social and the intellectual parts of the brain depends on the quality of early experiences. In addressing health and safety, the critical nature of children's experiences to the development of the brain is mental health. Children need protection from injury and infection, both of which can lead to discomfort, disability, or death. They also need activities that promote healthy growth and development. Childhood is a unique period of life with physical, intellectual, emotional, and social growth all occurring simulta-

neously and interactively. Children's bodies and minds are learning how to meet challenges of the environment all the time.

The health component of child care should be planned to respond to the predictable developmental patterns of young children as they progress from young infants to toddlers to preschool children to school-age children and then to self-sufficient older children. The needs of each developmental stage differ. At each developmental level, early childhood professionals must simultaneously function as protectors, role models, and teachers for the children in their care.

Health and safety are not external patches or optional aspects of programs. Regardless of the limits imposed by funding, staffing, physical, or curricular constraints, the health component should be an integrated part of daily program activity. The health component involves risk management and anticipatory learning for the group. Compromises are necessary since a completely risk-free and infection-proof program is not possible. Actually, a risk-free environment is undesirable because it would not meet the child development need of children to experience challenge. Risk management involves making choices and finding acceptable alternative approaches so children can experience challenges without major adverse consequences.

Suggested Activities

- Do a self-assessment of your own health behavior. When you are in a hurry or distracted, do you take risks that you would not consider acceptable if you gave more thought to them? What are those risks? What practices would you change?
- Look at the table of contents for this manual. What aspects of a child care health component have you given most attention? Which could you give more consideration? Are there areas that you avoid or emphasize because you find some more or less appealing? Which are these and why are they more or less appealing to you?
- What references and resources inform your work on health and safety in child care settings? How current are they? How can you determine whether they are authoritative and up-to-date? Who in your community can you consult as an expert on medical, nutrition, oral health, and mental health issues?