Medical News

EDITED BY ELAINE LARSON, PHD, RN

Daycare Cleanliness Questioned by Report

Daycare providers are being urged to establish strict handwashing policies after a recent study of six centers found high levels of fecal coliform contamination, especially in kitchens and on the hands of teachers and children.

Sampling 675 surfaces over a six-month period at day care centers in the San Francisco, California, vicinity, researchers recovered fecal coliiorms from nearly 10% of tested areas. Toys and toilets showed unexpectedly low recovery rates (2% and 4%), while samples taken from kitchen surfaces and the hands of staff tested positive 19% and 16% of the time, respectively.

Published in *Public Health* Nursing, the findings may explain why daycare centers outstrip private households and daycare homes in the frequency of diarrhea1 illnesses.

In the course of their testing, Bonnie Holaday, RN, from the Vanderbilt University School of Nursing in Nashville, Tennessee, and three colleagues from the University of California in San Francisco, also collected cultures from diaper-changing areas, furniture, table tops and counter tops, faucets, drinking fountains, and walls.

Based on information collected by interviewing center directors and observing staff members, the team determined that two of the six daycare facilities had poor handwashing techniques and no policy for handwashing before eating or after being outside. They also determined that a child's socioeconomic status, the time of year, and the number of toilet-trained children had little or no impact on the rate of fecal coliiorm recovery.

One factor that did appear to have a positive effect on maintaining a relatively coliform-free environment was the presence of an on-site registered nurse at one of the centers.

In its report, the testing team noted that approximately half of all American infants and 80% of preschoolers are housed in daycare facilities while their parents work. Furthermore, compared with diarrhea1 diseases, only respiratory infections pose a greater health problem to those children.

To combat the spread of enteric diseases among this population, the study suggested that improvements be made in the distribution of printed information on handwashing and that handwashing facilities be made more available. This was considered especially important because government education efforts appear to be falling short.

Also recommended was oversight of cleanliness procedures by a trained healthcare worker and regular cleansing with germicidal detergents in areas other than washrooms. To further emphasize the point, the report called for "cleansibility" to be emphasized in the design and construction of surfaces in daycare centers.

From *Infectious Diseases in Children.* July 1991;4:1.

Group A Strep May Be Becoming More Virulent

Group A streptococci, which have caused relatively mild infections such as strep throat in recent decades, may be acquiring greater virulence, Dennis L. Stevens, MD, reported.

Studies conducted by Stevens and his colleagues at the Veterans' Affairs Medical Center, Boise, Idaho, suggest that cytokines are produced in massive quantities in response to certain streptococcal virulence factors.

"This overreaction on the part of the nonimmune host orchestrates or mediates tissue destruction, shock, and death," said Stevens.

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