



Infectious Disease Prevention

Common infectious diseases can interfere with student learning including by keeping students from attending school. Because large numbers of students are housed together during the school day, disease can spread easily among students unless there is active disease monitoring and planning to control outbreaks. Additionally, some students or staff, such as those with chronic conditions, may be more vulnerable to disease or complications of disease.

Serious or potentially serious infectious diseases that can affect children and adults in school settings include the common cold, flu, chicken pox, conjunctivitis (pink eye), diarrhea, foodborne illness, hepatitis (types A, B, or C), AIDS, herpes, measles, mosquito-borne illness, sexually transmitted diseases (such as chlamydia, gonorrhea), strep throat, and tuberculosis.

Other “nuisance diseases” that do not pose serious health risks but can be disruptive include ringworm, athlete’s foot, and head lice.

Infectious Disease Policy and Procedure

Schools are required by state law to collaborate with local public health to control infectious disease (including notifying the health department of specific disease outbreaks), and should be prepared to help parents identify health resources for children when medical treatment is necessary. State law requires that students receive immunizations at specific ages, prior to entering school, for the purpose of preventing infectious disease outbreaks. Each school district should have a policy to address infectious disease.

School staff are also required to protect the confidentiality of persons with disease conditions, and may only release that information to others (including a school nurse or principal) who are responsible for disease control.

Principals reported about two-thirds (69 percent) of secondary school have a written policy that protects the rights of students and/or staff with HIV infection or AIDS.

Most schools with written policies have specific HIV management policies that address prevention, control, and confidentiality for students and staff who may be affected, including;

- 98 percent have policies to maintain confidentiality of HIV-infected students and staff.
- 98 percent have work site safety policies (universal precautions for all school staff).
- 95 percent have anti-discrimination procedures to protect HIV-infected students and staff.
- 94 percent have policy implementation procedures.
- 91 percent have policies regarding the attendance of students with HIV.
- 91 percent have adequate HIV infection training for staff.
- 86 percent communicate the policy to students, staff, and parents.
- 81 percent have confidential counseling for HIV infected students.



Infectious Disease Instruction

Just under half (46 percent) of health teachers reported educating students about immunizations and vaccinations as part of a required health education course.

Health teachers from most schools (72 percent of high schools and 83 percent of middle schools) reported educating students about personal hygiene, which can limit the spread of disease.

Additionally, almost two-thirds of health teachers from high schools (62 percent) and some from middle schools (37 percent) had students identify information about health services that are available in their communities.

About 70 percent of secondary school health teachers reported educating students about food safety.

See the “Sexual Health” fact sheet for additional information about HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted disease instruction.

Infectious Disease Staff Development

Few health teachers reported receiving staff development on immunizations (17 percent) and personal hygiene (10 percent).

Somewhat more reported being interested in receiving staff development on these topics. About one-third of health teachers reported wanting more immunization training (32 percent) and personal hygiene training (36 percent).

Infectious Disease Resources

A comprehensive guide to managing infectious disease in school settings, *Infectious Disease Control Guide for School Staff* (April 2004), is available at the OSPI Web site:

<http://www.k12.wa.us/healthservices/pubdocs/InfectiousDiseaseControlGuide3-11-04.pdf>.

Information about immunization requirements for schools, sample parent letters, and schedules for youth immunizations is available at:

<http://www.doh.wa.gov/cfh/immunize/schools.htm>.