

## Avoiding infection: What to do at the doctor's office



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Doctor's offices are often child-friendly places, with toys and play areas for children. A friendly space helps your child feel comfortable at the doctor's office.

As a parent, you might worry about whether your child can pick up germs in the doctor's office that could make him sick. While this can happen, there are things you can do to reduce your child's chance of catching an infection

### Aren't doctors' offices filled with sick people?

Not all children who visit the doctor are carrying harmful germs. Many children who visit the doctor are healthy. They may be there for a vaccine or for a regular exam. Some children have health problems that cannot be passed to others.

Of course, some children are at the doctor's office because they have coughs, colds, diarrhea or rashes. Infections, especially colds and diarrhea, are very common in young children. Most are mild, but it is possible for your child to catch an infection from another child. Your child can also get these infections from siblings or playmates, at family gatherings, in child care centres or other public places. One study found that children were not more likely to get an infection after a visit to their doctor's office than after other routine activities.

### How can I help to prevent my child from catching an illness?

Your doctor will try to minimize your child's contact with infection in the office. But keeping children away from each other and stopping them from sharing toys is hard in a waiting room.

While your child cannot avoid all germs, there are some tips to help you reduce the chance of getting sick.

- Most infections are spread by hands. Washing your hands and your child's hands is the best way to stop the spread of germs. When your child is old enough, teach him how and when to wash his hands. Find out if sinks or hand cleaners (such as alcohol-based hand rinses or pre-moistened hand wipes) are available in the waiting room. Be prepared; carry

your own hand cleaner or wipes in case they are not available.

- Wash your hands and your child's:
  - after wiping your or your child's nose,
  - after changing your child's diaper or helping him use the toilet,
  - before feeding your child, or eating, and
  - after handling public telephones or other frequently touched objects in the waiting room.
- Young children spread infections because they touch each other often, they put things in their mouths, and they put their fingers in their mouths and noses. If your child is very young, avoid letting her play with or share toys with other young children in the waiting room. Instead, bring her favourite toy or book with you. When your child is old enough, teach her not to put her fingers in her mouth or nose.
- 'Cough hygiene' (or cough etiquette) is also important to prevent the spread of infection. If your child has a cough or cold, cover his mouth and nose with tissues when he coughs or sneezes. If you have a cold, do the same. Some offices may provide masks for you and your child (if he is old enough to wear one) if coughing. After cleaning your child's nose or your own, put the used tissues into a garbage container (or a plastic bag if none is available), and clean your hands and your child's hands.
- If your child has a cold, cough or diarrhea, let the receptionist know when you arrive. Depending on his age and condition, you may be asked to stay in a certain part of the waiting room and to keep your child from playing with other children. If your child has a very contagious disease (such as chickenpox or measles), call the clinic before you go because they might bring you into an examination room as soon as you arrive. If you are not sure, call anyway!

- Make sure that your child receives all of the routine immunizations at the right age.
- If your child has a condition that makes her especially fragile and prone to infections, she should not share toys with other children until she is old enough to understand how infections are caught, can

keep from putting things in her mouth, and knows to clean her hands after sharing objects.

**For more information**

- Handwashing for parents and kids.  
<<http://www.caringforkids.cps.ca>>

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