

Understanding Common Childhood Illnesses

Level 2



About the Level 2 Certificate in Understanding Common Childhood Illnesses

If you care for babies or young children in a personal or professional capacity, it is crucial that you have a good understanding of childhood illnesses. This includes understanding why children may become unwell, being able to spot the signs of a developing illness and knowing what to do in these situations.

In this course, you will learn about a range of infectious illnesses that babies and young children are particularly vulnerable to. Unfortunately, some of these are on the rise. In fact, in 2019 the UK lost its measles-free status. As the powerful quote by the author Roald Dahl tells us overleaf, we must always be vigilant for the signs that a child may be unwell, trust our instincts and never underestimate the potentially devastating effects of infectious illnesses, regardless of how rare they may be.

As well as infectious illnesses, you will also look at other conditions that can make a child unwell or distressed, such as asthma, diabetes and epilepsy. Babies and young children are also prone to accidents and these can cause them to become unwell, sometimes to the point where they become a medical emergency. You will therefore conclude this course by looking at accidents and incidents that commonly involve babies and young children, such as bumps to the head (and possible concussion), burns and scalds, choking and allergic reactions, focusing upon the actions you should take in these situations to safeguard a child in your care.

Aims

The aims of the course are to develop knowledge and understanding of:

- The different types of infection and how these are spread.
- Ways to minimise cross-infection with babies and young children.
- The role of healthy initiatives when working with babies, young children and families, such as immunisations and healthy eating.
- How to recognise when a baby or young child is unwell.
- How to care for a baby or child who is unwell in an early years setting.
- Accidents that may occur in an early years setting.
- Serious illnesses in babies and young children, such as meningitis and septicaemia.
- The management of acute and chronic health conditions in an early years setting.
- Allergies and food intolerance in babies and young children.

Course content

This course has three units. These have been grouped together into two modules:

Module A

Unit 1: Understand how to provide a safe and healthy environment for babies and young children

Module B

Unit 2: Understand common childhood illnesses

Unit 3: Understand health emergencies and specific health conditions in an early years setting

NOTES FOR LEARNERS

Age range covered by this qualification

In this qualification, 'babies and young children' refers to an age range of 0–5 years old.

Accessing online materials when studying for this course

If you search for information on the Internet make sure that the sites you access are valid and trustworthy. For this qualification, the NHS website and websites of large charities for specific illnesses will give you appropriate information.

Unit 1

Understand how to provide a safe and healthy environment for babies and young children



Section 1

How infection is spread

In this section you will learn about:

- Types of infection
- Direct and indirect transmissions of infection

Types of infection

The word 'infection' is used to describe **illness caused by microorganisms** (tiny living organisms). These organisms are usually so small they can only be seen by using a powerful microscope.

The different types of microorganisms are:

- Bacteria
- Viruses
- Fungi
- Parasites

Not all microorganisms cause infection. Our body's natural defence – the immune system – is usually strong enough to fight off any ill effects. Also, not all microorganisms are bad. In fact, some are beneficial to the body; for example, the bacteria that live in the gut help to maintain digestion and protect the body from infection. Some types of bacteria are also used to make medicines and vaccines and to ferment milk and make yoghurt.

Harmful microorganisms that cause infection are known as pathogens, though we often simply refer to them as '**germs**'. On the next page, you will look at the different types of harmful pathogens that cause infection.



Indirect transmission of infection

This is where there is no direct contact between people. Transmissions occur when the host ‘sheds’ pathogens into the air, water, foods or onto objects in the environment. This can be through:

- Breathing in droplets of air from people coughing or sneezing.
- Touching a contaminated object (such as utensils, door handles, phones and clothing) or surface (such as floors).
- Coming into contact with contaminated bodily fluids such as blood, urine or faeces (poo).
- Eating food that is contaminated.

? ? Did you know? ? ? ? ?

Contamination means the presence of something that is not wanted. In the case of infection, contamination means that an object, person or other item is polluted or affected by pathogens.

During the working day, it is important to **wash hands after going to the toilet, and before and after carrying out any activities** such as preparing food, feeding babies and children, toileting or nappy changing. It is also important to follow workplace procedures for the use of **protective equipment such as disposable gloves and aprons, which help to protect against cross-contamination and infection**. You will learn more about hand-washing, policies and procedures and the use of protective equipment later in this unit.

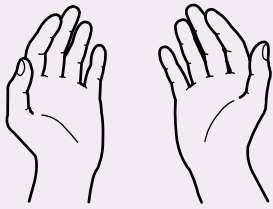
Any **cuts or open sores on the skin should be covered so that infection cannot spread to or from them**. If adults are ill with colds, flu, digestive upsets causing diarrhoea or vomiting, or any other infection, they should inform their manager; they may be required to **stay off work** so that these are not passed on to the babies and children. It is important to remember that minor ailments in adults can have more serious effects on babies and young children.

CHILD PERSONAL HYGIENE

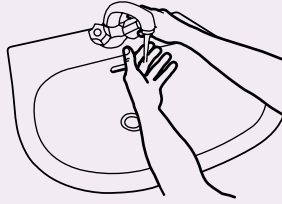
As well as keeping themselves clean, early years workers also have a responsibility for the cleanliness of babies and young children in the care setting. Young children will require help with eating, drinking and going to the toilet. Babies will need to be fed and have nappies changed. All these activities require childcare workers to **ensure that the baby or young child is clean, to minimise the risk of infection**.

Babies should be **cleaned with appropriate wipes, or baby soap and water**. This will include ensuring that hands and face are clean and that the bottom and genital area is properly cleaned after nappy changing.

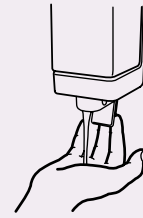




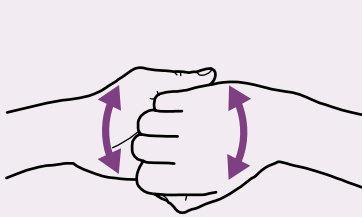
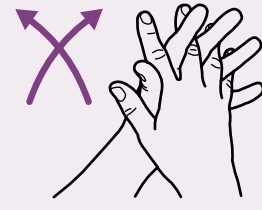
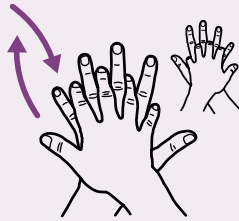
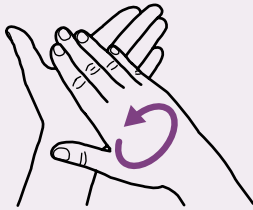
1. REMOVE JEWELLERY AND WATCHES. ROLL UP SLEEVES TO THE ELBOW.



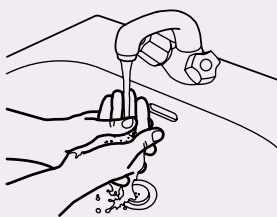
2. WET THE HANDS WITH WARM WATER.



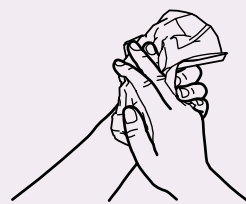
3. APPLY LIQUID SOAP OR ANTIBACTERIAL HAND WASH.



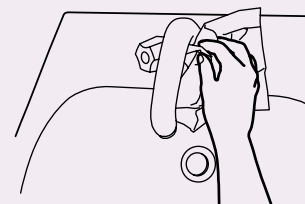
4. WASH HANDS BY RUBBING THE HANDS PALM-TO-PALM, INTERLACING FINGERS AND WASHING BETWEEN FINGERS AND TIPS OF FINGERS, AND WASHING THE WRISTS. ENSURE EVERY PART OF THE HANDS IS WASHED.



5. RINSE THE HANDS IN WARM WATER.



6. DRY THOROUGHLY WITH A DISPOSABLE TOWEL.



7. USE THE TOWEL TO TURN OFF THE TAP.

? Did you know? ? ? ? ?

The World Health Organization says that proper hand-washing should take about as long as it takes to sing 'Happy Birthday' twice through!

Section 4

Healthy initiatives

In this section you will learn about:

- Immunisation
- Identifying and promoting healthy initiatives

Immunisation

Immunisation is where an individual is protected against an infectious disease by making them immune from or more able to resist the disease. This is usually achieved by giving the individual a vaccine.

A **vaccine** is a substance made from a small amount of the disease-causing microorganism (or one that resembles it). The vaccine is most commonly administered by injection, and once in the body it **stimulates the immune system to create antibodies** that destroy the microorganism. If the same type of microorganism attacks the person in the future, the immune system is able to 'remember' how it dealt with the previous attack and quickly produces sufficient antibodies to disarm the invading microorganism. This makes the body better able to recognise and attack similar microorganisms in the future. Once your immune system knows how to fight a disease, it can often protect you for many years.

Vaccination also benefits the whole community through something called '**herd immunity**' or '**population protection**'. This means that if enough people are vaccinated, it is much harder for a disease to spread to those who cannot have vaccines, such as people who are ill, or have severe allergies or a weakened immune system.

? ? Did you know? ? ? ? ?

Immunisation is one of the biggest health successes of the last century. For instance, the disease smallpox was eradicated worldwide by vaccines by 1980. In the United Kingdom, potentially fatal infections such as diphtheria, polio and whooping cough have all been drastically reduced. For example, in 1940 there were 3,283 deaths from diphtheria in the UK; but between 1986 and 2002 following widespread vaccination, there were just two deaths. The vaccine for meningitis C introduced in 1999 has reduced cases of the disease by 99 per cent in individuals under 20.



Healthy eating

Healthy eating means eating a healthy, balanced diet. Healthy diets will help children to maintain a healthy weight and give them the nutrients they need to grow and thrive.

Initiatives to promote healthy eating include:

- Planning healthy, balanced menus using the **‘five-a-day’** model (five portions of fruit and vegetables every day)
- Providing **healthy snacks** such as fresh fruit and vegetables instead of biscuits and cakes
- Educating children about healthy eating through, for example, **playing shop** to buy healthy ingredients



Unit 2

Understand common childhood illnesses



Section 1

Identifying illness

In this section you will learn about:

- Identifying when a baby or child is unwell
- The causes, signs and symptoms of common childhood illnesses
- Knowing when to seek medical assistance

Identifying when a baby or child is unwell

Unlike older children and adults, babies and younger children may not be able to tell you when they are not feeling well. This can be because they are not talking yet, they don't have the words to describe how they feel, or simply that they don't know that they are ill. Therefore, it is important to be able to recognise the signs of illness.

In babies and young children, the signs of illness may include:

- Being drowsy
- Difficulty breathing or rapid breathing or panting
- Skin looking pale or mottled
- Having fits or seizures
- Diarrhoea, unusual colour stools or blood in stools
- Fever – a temperature above 38°C
- Looking flushed or pale
- Not eating
- Feeling hot to the touch
- Having a rash
- Repeated vomiting
- Repeated coughing

Other signs in babies can include:

- Having a high-pitched, weak or continuous cry
- Fewer wet nappies
- Being unresponsive
- Changes to the fontanelle

? ? Did you know? ? ? ? ?

The fontanelle is the soft spot that babies have on their heads where the skull has not yet fused. A **sunken fontanelle** may indicate dehydration, though the fontanelle is naturally slightly curved inwards. A **swollen fontanelle** may indicate swelling or a bleed to the brain.

Other signs in young children can include:

- Being fretful and irritable
- Being 'clingy' with caregivers
- No interest in playing
- Being quieter than usual



- Complaining of feeling cold
- Complaining of pain
- Difficulty in passing urine or stools

Often, **the first sign of a baby or child feeling unwell is a change in behaviour.** If they are eating, sleeping, responding and playing normally, there is unlikely to be anything wrong. The most common symptoms of childhood illnesses are a **high temperature, regular vomiting, diarrhoea, pain or coughing.**



Key point

The first sign of illness in babies and young children is quite often a change in their behaviour. They may cry, be irritable, stop eating, be listless and not want to do anything.

The causes, signs and symptoms of common childhood illnesses

There are some illnesses that are relatively common in children. The table shows some common illnesses with their causes, signs and symptoms.

ILLNESS	CAUSE	SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS
Bronchiolitis	Virus – usually the respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), which is very common, but can also be caused by other viruses infecting the respiratory tract. Spread through droplets released when people cough or sneeze.	Early symptoms are similar to a cold – a runny nose and cough. This can develop into a persistent cough with a fever and, in more serious cases, breathing difficulties. Babies feed less and may be sick after feeding.
Chickenpox	Virus – highly contagious. Children may catch it from other children through touch or through droplets of fluid in the air. Most infectious in the 1–2 days before the rash appears.	Headache, fever and a red rash, which develops into itchy blisters that are filled with fluid.
Conjunctivitis	Can occur due to a bacterial or viral infection, irritation to the eye from chemicals or other substances, or allergic reaction. Viral or bacterial forms can be passed on through touch or, for example, sharing towels.	Red, itchy eyes, sticky eyelids. Eyes will water more than usual and there may be a sticky yellow discharge if the cause is bacterial. Older children may complain of sore eyes and blurred vision.

Section 2

Managing illness

In this section you will learn about:

- Treatments for common childhood illnesses
- The needs of babies and children when unwell in an early years setting
- Information and support

Treatments for common childhood illnesses

You will find some specific suggestions for treating common illnesses and symptoms overleaf. Generally speaking, the most suitable treatment for a sick baby or child is usually **rest, keeping them warm, and giving plenty of fluids in order to avoid dehydration**. If they are not eating, they can be **tempted with food** but shouldn't be forced to eat. Most illnesses will clear up quite quickly on their own and without the need for medical treatments.





The need for observation and monitoring

Babies and children who show signs of being unwell **need to be observed and monitored** to identify new symptoms and whether symptoms become worse.

The **staff member's role** will be to **monitor temperature** and **check for other signs of illness** such as rashes and breathing difficulties, as well as maintaining checks on **food and drink intake**. If trained and authorised to do so, they may need to **administer medicines** (which should only be done with the parent's consent). All of these things must be recorded and the information passed on to parents.

If the baby or child is becoming more unwell or could be an infection risk, then **parents or carers may need to be contacted to collect the baby or child**.

? Did you know? ? ? ? ?

Babies under 28 days should have their temperature checked using an underarm thermometer. Older children can also use a thermometer that goes into the ear. Forehead strips are not recommended, as they are not accurate.

Unit 3

Understand health emergencies and specific health conditions in an early years setting



Scalds and burns

Babies and young children have very sensitive skin, and will scald or burn at much lower temperatures than an adult. Most scald injuries happen at home in the bath. In early years settings care needs to be taken to ensure that children and babies are not allowed near hot drinks, hot water, kettles and other cooking appliances and that food is not served until it is at the right temperature. Water for hand-washing should be kept at a low temperature. Some chemicals can also cause burns to the skin and should not be kept within reach of children. These commonly include the chemicals in some household cleaning products and in bleach.

? Did you know? ? ? ? ?

A hot drink can still scald a baby or child 15 minutes after being made.

Cuts from glass or other sharp objects

Cuts can occur from broken glass or crockery, sharp knives or other sharp objects. Glass in windows and doors can also be a risk to small children if they fall through it. Any window or door glass in early years settings should be laminated or toughened safety glass, which is hard to break and will not shatter into small, sharp pieces when broken. Plates and cups used by children at nursery should be plastic, and knives and forks used by children should not be sharp. Any pottery or glass should be kept away from areas where children play. Play equipment and furnishings in the setting should be regularly checked to ensure there are no sharp edges.

Poisoning

Children can be poisoned by eating or drinking cleaning substances, cosmetics, medicines and plants in the garden. Nursery settings must have strict controls over any chemicals and medicines in the setting, ensuring that these are kept securely out of the reach of children. Any plants in the setting should not be poisonous or irritate the skin.

Choking

Babies and children can choke on small items. These can include pieces of food, small foods such as nuts or grapes, toys or small pieces from toys. Button batteries (small, circular batteries often found in toys) are a particular hazard nowadays. One of the ways that babies and young children explore is by putting things in their mouth, so it is important that the setting does not have small objects that can be swallowed, that food is served in safely manageable pieces, and that children are closely supervised when eating and when using items that could be swallowed, such as wax crayons or play-dough. Toys should always be age-suitable as this will help to prevent choking risks.

Recording and reporting accidental injuries

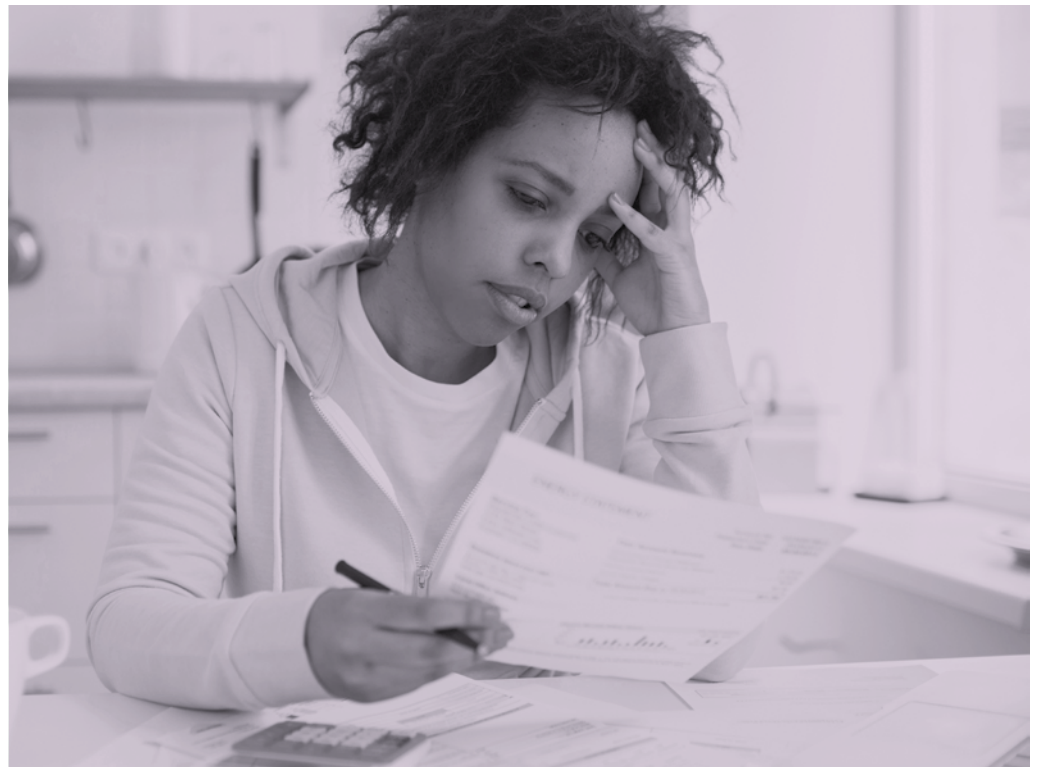
If you work in an early years setting, you need to be aware of both the recording and reporting procedures that should be followed when a child has an accident in the setting.

Recording accidents in the early years setting

By law, all registered early years providers are required to keep a written or electronic record of any accidents, injuries and first aid treatments that occur in their setting. Information that must be recorded includes:

- Date and time of the incident.
- The name and age of the child involved.
- The name of the person completing the record.
- Details about the injury.
- Description of where the incident occurred.
- Description of what occurred and actions taken.

Records must be secured in accordance with data protection legislation and must be kept for three years following the incident. Regular reviews of the records will help managers identify any patterns or trends in accidents or incidents, and enable them to take action to reduce risks in the future.



Section 2

Serious illness in babies and young children

In this section you will learn about:

- Signs of serious illness and how to deal with them
- Statutory guidance for reporting notifiable diseases

Signs of serious illness and how to deal with them

In rare cases, children may show the signs of serious illness whilst in the early years setting. In this section you will examine the causes, signs and symptoms of three potentially life-threatening conditions – **meningitis, septicaemia and seizures**. You will also look at the actions that should be taken if any of these conditions are suspected.

Meningitis

Meningitis is an illness where the linings that surround the brain and spinal cord swell up. It can affect anyone, but is most common in babies, young children, teenagers and young adults. Meningitis can be very serious if not treated quickly. It can cause life-threatening blood poisoning (septicaemia) and result in permanent damage to the brain or nerves. Although most children make a good recovery, sadly one in ten will die and some will be left with lifelong disabilities.

Meningitis is usually caused by a viral or bacterial infection.

Viral meningitis is not as serious as bacterial meningitis but can make children very poorly and can last several weeks. A number of viruses can cause viral meningitis including enteroviruses (viruses that usually only cause a mild stomach infection), the mumps virus and the herpes simplex virus (a virus that usually causes cold sores or genital herpes).

Bacterial meningitis is life-threatening and requires urgent medical attention. A number of different bacteria can cause bacterial meningitis, including meningococcal bacteria (there are several different types, called A, B, C, W, X, Y and Z), pneumococcal bacteria and haemophilus influenzae type b (Hib) bacteria.