

Guidance for Changing Soiled Underwear for Toddlers

Susan S. Aronson, MD, FAAP
Founder and Pediatric Advisor for ECELS-Healthy Child Care PA
Clinical Professor of Pediatrics, The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, The University of PA

Disposable *pull-up* underpants and underwear for children who still have "toileting accidents" helps many children move from diapers toward independent toileting. However, changing soiled *pull-ups* or underwear introduces an increased risk of spread of infection from urine and stool. When a child has urine or stool on clothing, teachers/caregivers should avoid contaminating other surfaces in the environment. If surfaces become contaminated with urine or stool –these surfaces must be cleaned and sanitized immediately after changing the child's soiled clothing.

The Risks:

The urine of toddlers and preschool age children should be expected to contain the germ Cytomegalovirus (CMV). The CMV germ can cause a flu-like illness in adults, and severe harm to the unborn baby of a pregnant woman. Many studies have shown that a large proportion of young children have had CMV (cytomegalovirus) without having symptoms themselves.

Stool (feces) is a common carrier of bacteria and many viruses. Episodes of diarrhea are increased in child care settings. In settings where sanitation is not a priority, germs that cause diarrhea are commonly found in large amounts on floors, tables, toys, and on the hands of caregivers and children. Rotavirus, Norovirus, hepatitis A, shigella, salmonella, and disease-causing E-coli are among the long list of common germs known to cause outbreaks of diarrhea and vomiting in child care.

Prevention:

Removing soiled pull-up or training underwear:

To minimize contamination of the clothing and the environment, the teacher/caregiver must help the child remove soiled pull-up or training underwear observing the following requirements:

- Supplies and Equipment:
Assemble all supplies for the change, removing them from their containers to avoid contamination of the containers during the change. Bring a disposable cover for the area where the change will occur, the expected amount of wipes, fresh underwear, gloves, and 2 plastic bags -- one for the soiled disposable items and one for the soiled clothing. A hands-free waste container should be used for the contaminated disposable items from the change.
- Changing Surface:
Cover the surface on which the change occurs with sufficient disposable material to protect whatever is underneath. For example, use a thick layer of newspaper covered with clean paper towels to reduce the amount of germs that get through to