

Safe management and use of shared toys and play therapy equipment in healthcare settings

Key points

Shared toys and play therapy equipment are commonly used in healthcare settings to provide children with comfort and to support their physical and emotional wellbeing, development, and recovery.

There is a risk that sharing toys and play therapy equipment between paediatric patients may contribute to the spread of infectious diseases in healthcare settings.

This resource provides acute, primary and community health service organisations with guidance on how to select, clean and store shared toys and play therapy equipment to minimise the risk of healthcare-associated infections. The cleaning of children's own toys that may be brought to healthcare settings is not addressed in this resource. This resource should be used in conjunction with current Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care resources for [environmental cleaning](#).

Background

In healthcare settings, the transmission of infectious agents may occur through direct and indirect contact with contaminated environmental surfaces.

The risk of infection transmission via this route may be higher for paediatric patients due to children's mouthing and tactile behaviours and the use of shared toys and play therapy equipment.

Health service organisations must ensure that shared toys and play therapy equipment:

- Meet relevant Australian safety standards, such as AS/NZS ISO 8124 Safety of Toys
- Are safe for use by children
- Can be effectively cleaned and disinfected
- Are effectively cleaned and disinfected after use
- Are stored appropriately when not in use.

Healthcare workers, parents, and carers who use shared toys and play therapy equipment when caring for children must be aware of how to safely use, clean, and store these items.

Appropriate hand hygiene practices should be promoted as part of the management and use of shared toys and play therapy equipment in healthcare settings. Hand hygiene education and [resources](#) should be provided to support parents, carers, and children.

Selecting shared toys and play therapy equipment for the healthcare setting

Toys and play therapy equipment can be shared between children if they:

- Are made of non-porous, wipeable, smooth material suitable for cleaning (e.g. plastic, metal, lacquered wood)
- Are easy to clean and undamaged
- Do not retain water or moisture.



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Toys and play therapy equipment should be inspected regularly, and disposed of if surfaces become worn (including peeling paint), damaged (including cracks), or show signs of dampness or mould. Toys and play therapy equipment which are hard to clean should not be used, unless a risk assessment is undertaken and appropriate strategies are in place before use to reduce the risk of infection transmission.

Children with an infectious disease, or during an infectious disease outbreak, should use their own, or dedicated toys and play therapy equipment. When the children with an infectious disease has been discharged or the outbreak has been controlled and closed, toys and play therapy equipment should be cleaned and disinfected. Toys and play therapy equipment should be disposed of if they cannot be appropriately cleaned and disinfected.

Safety considerations

Health service organisations must ensure compliance with age-appropriate classifications when providing toys and play therapy equipment.

The following toys and play and therapy equipment must be avoided:

- Those that are hard to clean (multiple and small parts; foam based or foam components)
- Water retaining, hollow or sponge bath toys
- Those that run on button batteries
- Those that do not meet relevant Australian standards for child safety.

When disinfecting toys and play therapy equipment with a high likelihood of being mouthed, additional steps such as rinsing with water after disinfection may be required to prevent chemical residual and risk of chemical poisoning. Always follow the manufacturer's Instructions for Use for the disinfectant product.

Cleaning shared toys and play therapy equipment

General cleaning principles

Toys and play therapy equipment must be cleaned before and after use to remove dirt and infectious agents.

This will involve a physical clean either:

- With warm water and neutral detergent, followed by rinsing with water and drying OR
- Using a neutral detergent wipe, then allowing the surface to dry completely.

The same wipe should not be used to clean multiple toys and play therapy equipment.

When cleaning toys or equipment:

- Always start with cleaning the least dirty surface first before cleaning surfaces that are visibly soiled
- Ensure all surfaces of the toy or equipment are cleaned.

Health service organisations should establish safe work procedures that outline appropriate cleaning products, techniques, frequency, and documentation for cleaning of these items.

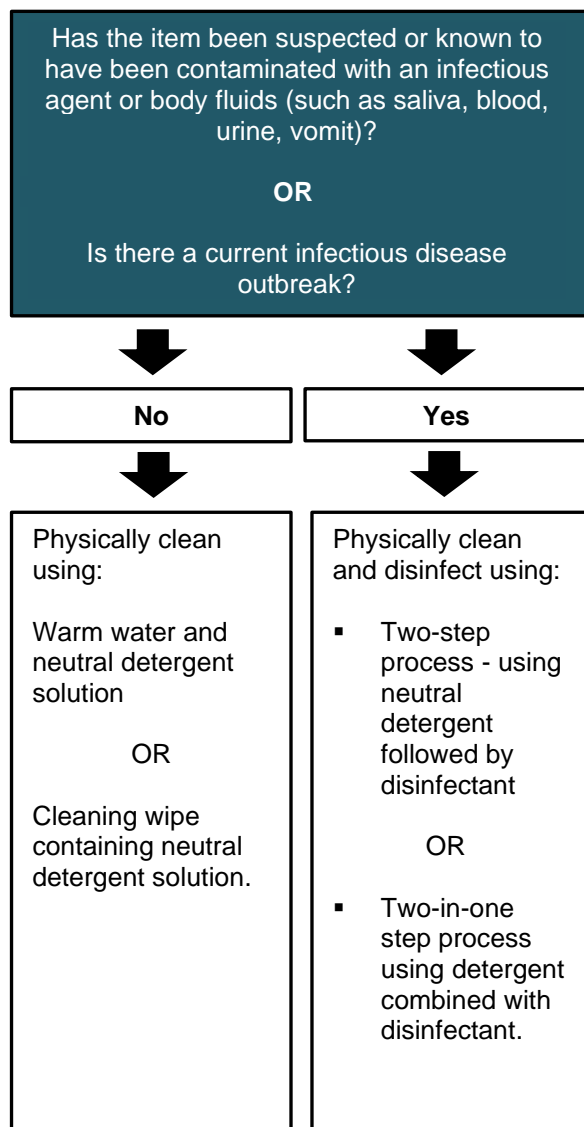
[Auditing](#) of the cleaning procedure should be undertaken as part of a quality improvement process.

Cleaning of shared toys and play therapy equipment when there is a risk posed by infectious agents

If toys and play therapy equipment are suspected or known to have been contaminated with an infectious agent or body fluids (such as saliva, blood, urine, vomit), or there is an infectious disease outbreak, a two-step cleaning and disinfection process or two-in-one step process is required.

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Figure 1: Cleaning process for toys and play therapy equipment in healthcare settings



For a disinfectant to be effective, it must:

- Have sufficient surface contact time to kill infectious agents
- Be used at the right concentration
- Be applied to clean and dry surfaces
- Have antimicrobial or virucidal activity against the specific infectious agent
- Be listed on the [Australian Register of Therapeutic Goods](#), consistent with manufacturers' Instructions for Use and recommended frequencies.

[safetyandquality.gov.au](https://www.safetyandquality.gov.au)



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Storing shared toys and play therapy equipment

To ensure toys and play therapy equipment are safe for use:

- Items must be cleaned and completely dried before storage
- Items should be stored in a dedicated area or a storage container that is made from a cleanable material. The storage container should be cleaned regularly
- Item must be inspected and cleaned after removing an item from storage and before use
- Cleaning schedules for toys and play therapy equipment and storage container should be documented. Auditing on the schedules and documentations is in line with organisational procedure.

Acknowledgements

Resources developed by The Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne, have informed the development of this guidance.

For more information about the Commission's work on paediatric infection prevention and control resources, please visit:

<https://www.safetyandquality.gov.au/our-work/infection-prevention-and-control>.

References

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