

Child Care Health Consultant Job Description

Background Information

Each child care program should have access to a child care health consultant who can provide consultation and technical assistance on child health issues. This consultant should have expertise in child health and development, and knowledge about the special needs of children in out-of-home child care settings.

Basic Functions

The child care health consultant's basic function is to prevent harm and promote optimal health in child care programs. The health consultant should seek to establish a relationship with child care providers; identify, implement, and evaluate strategies to achieve quality child care; establish basic health and safety operational guidelines and plans for the child care program and provider; and serve in a liaison capacity to other health professionals and community organizations.

The child care health consultant can be involved minimally (provide information over the telephone) or more extensively (provide advice and educational activities on-site). The health consultant should work closely with the local public health and child care resource and referral agencies and should have access to the state child care health consultant (if applicable).

Education, Expertise, and Abilities

Optimally, the child care health consultant should be a pediatrician, pediatric nurse practitioner, pediatric or community health nurse, or a health professional with expertise in mental health, nutrition, health education, oral health, environmental health, and/or emergency management. Familiarity with out-of-home child care regulations and community resources is essential. Knowledge and experience related to early brain and child development, early childhood education, and child care health and safety issues are preferred. The ability to work as a program consultant and strong written, verbal, and interpersonal communication skills are necessary.

Duties and Responsibilities

The child care health consultant can:

- Underscore the importance of a primary health care provider to serve as the "medical home" for each child.
- Ensure a system for communication among the child care provider, parent, and primary health care provider and consult when health issues arise.
- Perform on-site assessments of the child care environment and/or program operations.
- Assist child care providers in developing general policy statements and an annual plan for the child care program (eg, management of infectious diseases, fevers, and use of medications, and exclusion policies).
- Provide telephone consultation to child care providers as issues arise concerning specific policies and procedures.
- Help child care providers obtain, understand, and use information about the health status of individual children and staff.
- Educate children, their family members, and child care providers about child development, mental and physical health, safety, nutrition, and oral health issues.
- Link staff, families, and children with community health resources.
- Help identify and implement improvement plans.
- Educate and collaborate with licensing staff and policy makers to improve regulations, inspections, resources, and policies that promote safe and healthy child care.

Following are examples of specific activities of a child care health consultant:

1. Increase interactions that promote brain development.

Environment: Discuss the importance and availability of interactive play equipment.

Operations: Identify/enhance strategies to maintain adult:child ratios and recruit and retain competent staff.

2. Decrease the incidence of injuries.

Environment: Check for proper surfacing under and around playground equipment.

Operations: Ensure adequate supervision during active play.

3. Decrease the spread of infection.

Environment: Make sure adequate hand-washing equipment and supplies are provided (ie, soap, sinks, and hands-free, lidded trash cans).

Operations: Teach children and staff about proper hand-washing techniques.

4. Facilitate well-child preventive care.

Environment: Evaluate the information on the child health forms and set up a tickler system to identify children who are due for immunizations, well-child examinations, or other routine care.

Operations: Assist staff in learning how to interpret the information on the child health records as they receive them, facilitate implementation of the tickler system, and make appropriate pediatric referrals.

5. Encourage the inclusion of children with special needs.

Environment: Identify necessary changes that can be made to the physical environment to accommodate children with special needs.

Operations: Help develop an individualized treatment plan or specific guidelines for injuries or conditions of any child with special needs.

Enhancements

Administrators of larger center-based or institutional child care programs or programs serving children at increased risk may choose to identify a staff person with child health expertise or interest to serve as a point person on health issues, or as an on-site "health advocate." The health advocate can serve as a liaison between the staff and the consultant to identify and prioritize areas to be evaluated or where improvements need to occur. The consultant can educate and empower the health advocate to promote child health and safety in the child care setting on a daily basis, maximizing the effective use of available resources.