

Candidiasis (thrush)

Description

Thrush is caused by a fungus called *Candida*. Most people have this fungus on their skin, in their mouth and in their gut, where it lives harmlessly. However, it can sometimes cause infections, especially in moist places such as in infants' mouths or on their chins. It also can also infect the vagina, or the nipples of breastfeeding mothers. It is often associated with nappy rash—if a nappy rash is not clearing after 3 days or not responding to the usual cream, it may be thrush. Thrush is very common in infants because their immune systems have not yet developed.

Thrush appears as white spots or flakes. It can cause irritation, but it is usually not dangerous.

How does it spread?

Thrush is spread by direct contact with fungi living in the mouth, vagina and faeces, or on the skin. It can also spread on items that have contact with infected mouths (e.g. dummies, toys, cups, eating utensils). A mother can infect her infant during birth.

Incubation period

The incubation period is variable, but is usually 2–5 days in infants.

Infectious period

The infectious period is unclear, but probably as long as the white spots or flakes are present.²⁷

Exclusion period

Exclusion is not necessary.

Responsibilities of educators and other staff

- Do not allow children to share dummies, cups or eating utensils.
- Regularly wash toys and other objects that children put in their mouths.
- Make sure staff and children practise effective hand hygiene.
- Ensure that appropriate cleaning practices are being followed in the education and care service.

Responsibilities of parents

- Encourage hand hygiene at home.
- Clean and sterilise bottle teats and dummies or replace them to prevent reinfection.

²⁷ Candidiasis', in DL Heymann (ed.) 2008, *Control of communicable diseases manual*, 19th edn, American Public Health Association, Washington, DC, p. 99.

Controlling the spread of infection

- Do not share eating utensils, food or drinking cups. Thoroughly wash toys that infants and toddlers put in their mouths.
- Ensure that staff practise effective hand hygiene.
- Ensure that appropriate cleaning practices are being followed.

Treatment

For moderate to severe infections of the mouth, vulva or vagina, a doctor may prescribe antifungal medications. Wash the affected area with water, apply the prescribed cream and expose the affected area to air as much as possible.