

SENSORY PLAY

Sensory play tables are fun for children, but items and equipment can become easily contaminated and provide a source for disease-causing microorganisms to spread from one child to another. Proper cleaning, disinfection, handwashing and respiratory etiquette are important ways to stop the spread of infection during sensory play activities. We also recommend that sensory play items be dedicated to each child and cohort when possible.

Play dough

- Play dough must be made from non-toxic materials
- Ensure that staff and children wash their hands before and after handling the play dough
- Discard play dough at least weekly, or immediately if it is mouthed

Sand play tables

- Sand purchased for play table should be labelled as play sand and must indicate that it is silica-free
- Ensure that staff and children wash their hands before and after using the play table
- Discard sand in play tables at least weekly
- If sand becomes wet from water, allow it to thoroughly dry before the play table is covered
- If sand becomes wet from a substance other than water, it must be immediately discarded
- When the sand from the play table is emptied, the play table must be properly cleaned and disinfected before being refilled with new sand

Food sensory play tables

- Food products such as dry pasta or rice, must be stored in labelled containers with tight fitting lids
- Food used for sensory play should not be stored with food intended for consumption

- Ensure that staff and children wash their hands before and after using the play table
- Discard dried food products at least weekly or immediately if they become wet or contaminated
- Wet food products such as a gelatin product (e.g., Jello®) or cooked pasta must be discarded after each use
- When a food sensory play table is emptied, properly clean and disinfect it prior to refilling

Water play tables

- Use fresh potable water for each play session
- Ensure that staff and children wash their hands before and after using the play tables
- Empty water play tables daily. Once emptied, clean and disinfect the tables
- All toys used in the water play tables must be cleaned and disinfected at least once a day
- Keep water play tables covered when not in use
- Individual water play stations are recommended

Garden activities

- Use a gardening soil that is safe for children (e.g., soil that does not contain manure and/or fertilizer)
- Ensure that gardening tools (e.g., gardening gloves, shovels and rakes) are made for children and properly sized for their use
- Ensure children are well supervised to prevent them from placing their hands in their mouth, touching their face or eating soil/plants
- Select plants that are not poisonous. Special care should be taken in selecting those that do not cause allergic reactions for children and staff
- Ensure children and staff wash their hands after gardening activities

Sensory play during an outbreak

- If the child care setting is experiencing an outbreak, all communal sensory play must be terminated until the outbreak is declared over by York Region Public Health
- Any sensory play items prepared and in use prior to an outbreak being declared, must be discarded (e.g., play dough and dried food items)
- Also advisable to stop these activities during increased absenteeism

For more information refer to *A Public Health Guide For Child Care Providers* at york.ca/ChildCareGuide

Please note that additional public health measures may be advised during an outbreak or pandemic by YRPH and the Ministry of Education.