

PREVENTION FOR WORKING WITH CHILDREN

OSSO's volunteers are in contact with sometimes hundreds of children each day and inevitably some, and sometimes many, of the children or volunteers are sick with some sort of communicable/contagious illness (colds, sore throats, coughs, sinus infections, cold sores, flu, etc.). You'll most likely get more upper respiratory infections than you have in the past, not just because you're in Ecuador, but because you'll be working around so many children (anyone who begins working in daycares or teaching, etc. gets sick more often due to being around children who are passing illnesses around).

In order to avoid (as much as possible) spreading those illnesses either from volunteer to child or child to volunteer, there are many simple precautions that volunteers can and should take to help maintain health among volunteers and within the orphanages. Here are some things to keep in mind:

Wash your hands frequently! You'll constantly be changing diapers, wiping runny noses, touching dirty clothes, etc. with multiple children. This is an easy and common way to spread germs to everyone around you. Make sure to especially wash your hands before, in-between and after changing diapers, before feeding a child or eating something yourself, after cleaning up dirty clothes or toys, upon entering and leaving the orphanage, etc. Also, if you're sick yourself, wash your hands often to avoid spreading bacteria when touching kids, toys, bottles, spoons, clothes, etc. If you're sick and "itch" your nose with the back of your hand, or blow your nose using a Kleenex, or cough into your hand (never cough without covering your mouth and never cough toward the children or others), etc....you need to wash your hands before continuing doing what you were doing.

Although hand sanitizers are a convenient, easy way to "clean" your hands, they are not nearly as effective as hot water and soap. Anytime it's available, you should wash your hands with soap and hot water. We've found that this cuts down on volunteers getting sick or even getting parasites.

Kissing babies/children: We all love to kiss and love the babies/children! Again though, kissing them anywhere on their face is an easy way to spread germs from person to person due to the nose and mouth of each person being primary "passing" zones. So, when kissing the babies/children (as long as it's not against orphanage rules), avoid kissing them directly on the mouth. Also, avoid kissing them if either you or they are sick, has a cold sore, etc. In general, try to kiss the babies/children on their head to avoid spreading germs.

Wearing a mask: If you're sick (or children you're working with are sick), masks are available for you to wear to help prevent the spread of germs.

Working with newborns: With these delicate infants (generally 0-3 months), you need to be especially careful because their defenses are still so low. If you're ever sick, you should never work with the smallest babies—even if it's just a cold. Also, you should take extra precautions about spreading germs by washing your hands more often, not letting the other children around them, etc.

Wounds/cuts/diaper rash: If any volunteer has a wound or cut that has recently been bleeding or oozing any fluid, that wound or cut should be covered in some way. For wounds or cuts on hands, they should be covered either with a band-aid or by wearing gloves. Not doing so is not only dangerous to you for risk of infection but presents a risk to the children who come in contact with you.

Often the babies we're working with have diaper rash, sometimes severe diaper rash. If you choose to apply ointment/cream/medicine to these babies' bums without wearing gloves, you must wash your hands immediately after applying the ointment/cream/medicine. Diaper rash may not seem like a typical "wound or cut" due to the area where it's located, however, diaper rash can bleed and "weep" (a watery substance that oozes or seeps out of the swollen, red area) just like any wound or cut and must be treated with the same precautions for your health as well as the baby's health.

Blood-Spill Kits: There are many diseases that can be contracted through contact with blood; therefore, OSSO provides a kit at each site that is available to each of the volunteers in the case of an accident where blood is involved from anyone (including the volunteers).

The kit includes gloves, a spray bottle with sanitizer, hand sanitizer and a rag. This kit is not a first aid kit; it's to clean up blood on surfaces. We advise you to wear gloves every time you come into contact with open wounds or blood. Always be very cautious in these situations and make sure that you have no blood on you before moving to another activity.

These kits are only for volunteers; keep them in a secured area where only OSSO volunteers have access. If there's not a secure space available, the Site Leader has the responsibility to transport the kit to and from the orphanage each time. The Site Leader is also responsible for refilling and replacing materials in the kit when needed.