

**Senate Standing Committee on Education Employment and Workplace
Relations**

**QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Additional Estimates 2012-2013**

Outcome 1 - Early Childhood, Working Age and Indigenous Participation

DEEWR Question No. EW0979_13

Senator Nash asked on 14 February 2013, Hansard page 28

Question

Food Standards and Health and Safety in child care centres

Senator NASH: Finally, the issue of the shared birthday cake and blowing out the candles and the disastrous spreading of child germs. As a mother with two children who went through childcare who are perfectly healthy and over six foot tall and are really fine, I think the blowing out of the candles did not actually impact them too greatly, but I am seriously interested in where that is at? Is a service seriously going to be marked down by an assessor if they do allow a shared birthday cake and candles to be blown out? Mr De Silva: It does not go to the quality assessment. They were health guidelines that were issued last week. I think it was the fifth edition. If you look at the fourth edition, they are unchanged. It basically says best practice is, if you are having a cake, bring a single cake with a candle. It is unchanged since last time. It was reissued last week. Senator NASH: The re-emergence of the cupcake. Mr De Silva: It is what is considered best practice. Senator NASH: Okay, and I take your point that it was happening before and, I suspect just because it was happening before, for it to continue—but that is my personal opinion which I should not share with you. Is it something that will create an issue for a centre if they do not comply with those standards of individual cupcakes or the requirement to not blow out candles, will that centre get marked down? Ms Taylor: We may be leaving our province now, because my understanding these are health guidelines, not the quality standard guidelines. We may not be able to answer that. Senator NASH: All right. Given that it is obviously an enormous sector for your department; could you take on notice to perhaps acquire the information for us? Ms Taylor: Sure. We will probably need to go the health department or the health state agencies, I am not quite sure who it would be, but it is not in our portfolio. Senator NASH: I do not mind where you need to go, but if you would not mind, that would be very useful. Ms Taylor: No, that is fine.

Answer

The National Quality Framework requires services to have adequate health and hygiene practices and safe practices for handling, preparing and storing food to minimise risks to children being educated and cared for by services.

The Staying healthy-Preventing infectious diseases in early childhood education and care services Guidelines are published by the National Health, Medical and Research Council (NHMRC).

The NHMRC has stated that:

“Staying Healthy is best practice advice to help child care centres make good decisions for children in their care, not a new set of rules. The advice aims to reduce the risk of serious infections and infectious diseases spreading through child care centres to the children’s families, the workers and the community. It’s not about keeping children away from all germs. Assertions that cakes and candles will be “banned” are incorrect. This is not new advice—all of the items mentioned were in the previous edition, published in 2005.”

The NHMRC has also stated that:

“Development of Staying Healthy involved extensive consultation with the childhood and education section, experts and the public. It was reviewed by experts prior to publication, including paediatricians, communicable disease experts, a representative from Early Childhood Australia and population health experts. Public consultation was undertaken between November 2011 and January 2012. The principles outlined in Staying Healthy include effective hand hygiene, exclusion of ill children and adults, and immunisation. Additional to this is use of gloves, cough and sneeze etiquette, and effective environmental cleaning. These principles are applicable to every early education and care setting. However, not every centre will be able to implement the principles and the document allows for individual centres to use and implement the principles for keeping children healthy according to their philosophies and processes”.

Under the National Quality Framework, State and Territory Regulatory Authorities assess and rate each service and determine whether they meet the National Quality Standard, including in relation to its overall approach to ensuring health, safety and wellbeing of the children.