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Reopening: Guidance for Childcare Centers

Guidance Document

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Overview

The ability of daycare and childcare centers to provide parents, guardians, and families with childcare services has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. In some areas, childcare centers have been deemed “essential” by state and federal governments and have continued to provide childcare services (particularly for healthcare and other essential workers). Others were viewed as “non-essential” and their staff have been out of work during the shelter-in-place and stay-at-home orders. This document is intended to provide guidance for a range of child care programs including home-based childcare programs, private child care centers, Pre-kindergarten (pre-K) programs, Head Start and Early Head Start programs, childcare centers operated by municipalities, or those partnering with healthcare facilities for the children of essential workers (i.e., first responders, healthcare workers, transit workers, or other essential industries where a parent cannot stay home). Reopening and maintaining safe childcare facilities after a closure requires several considerations.

With restrictions being lifted and parents/guardians/families returning to work, childcare and parents are faced with difficult questions:

- How can we protect the health and safety of participating children/families and employees?
- How do we assure parents/guardians/families that we are doing all we can to prevent the spread of disease?
- What do we do if a contact of the child or childcare worker has tested positive or has a suspected case of COVID-19?
- How do we deal with cleaning and sanitizing high-contact surfaces such as toys, books, and stuffed animals regularly during the day?
- What are the best practices for drop-off and pick-up?

The purpose of this guide is to provide clear and actionable guidance towards the safe operations of childcare facilities through prevention, early detection, and control of COVID-19.

What should an Employer do to protect themselves and children/families attending the childcare facility?

Employers should continually monitor international (World Health Organization -WHO), federal (CDC), state, and local guidelines for updates and changes in recommendations, cleaning and disinfecting strategies, and other best management practices. They should seek guidance from regional, national, and international leaders relative to health policy and best practices. Employers should consider forming a team of professionals to monitor, assess, and implement new strategies as they become available. In addition, employers should consider the following strategies for reducing the risk of COVID-19 transmission in regards to physical distancing strategies, drop-off and pick-up, enhanced cleaning practices, restrooms, food preparation, employee and child wellness, training, waste and laundering, and risk communication.

Due to the wide variety of childcare facilities (e.g., functions, sizes, physical layout), it may not be possible to implement all of the following recommendations; however, trying to tackle the problem from multiple angles and with multiple layers can help reduce health risks. Staff training will be important.

Physical Distancing Strategies and Childcare Provider Contact with Children

- If possible, childcare classes should include the same group each day. Limit the mixing of children (e.g., stagger outdoor/playground activities, maintain separate groups for group activities such as art, music, and exercising). Consider whether to alter or halt daily group activities that may promote disease transmission.



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- Consider discontinuing or limiting to “essential” parent participation/volunteering or other daycare visitors/volunteers.
 - To the extent possible, keep each group of children in a separate room.
 - If feasible, the same childcare providers should remain with the same group each day.
 - Cancel or postpone special events such as festivals, holiday events, and special performances.
 - If possible, arrange for administrative staff to work from home.
 - Encourage staff not to linger or socialize in common areas.
 - It is important to comfort crying, sad, and/or anxious infants and toddlers, which may involve close contact with childcare providers. To the extent possible, when in close contact with children, childcare providers can protect themselves by wearing an over-large button down overlay that can be removed, in addition to a long sleeved shirt and by wearing long hair up off the collar.
- Drop-Off and Pick-Up**
- Consider relocating drop-off and pick-up location areas and staggering arrival and departure times or put in place other protocols to limit direct contact with parents/guardians/caretakers as much as possible.
 - If possible, childcare providers should greet children outside as they arrive and then walk or carry children to their classroom. At pick-up, staff should walk or carry children to their cars or caregiver outside of the building.
 - Infants should be transported in their car seats.
 - Schedule staff and family drop-off and pick-up times in advance.
 - When feasible, the same parent or designated person is encouraged to drop off and pick up the child.
 - If feasible, car seats and strollers should remain with the caregivers and not be stored at the daycare facility.
 - Regulate the use of common areas with clear signage (including maximum occupancy) and physical distancing measures in accordance with public health rules and guidelines.
 - Consider marking 6-foot increments on the floor so staff and families can maintain appropriate distancing at the sign-in station.
 - Consider providing infographic sheets or posting signage as a visual reminder of the appropriate protocol.
 - Provide hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol next to the sign-in station if a sink for handwashing is not readily accessible.
 - During drop-off and pick-up, staff and parents/guardians/caretakers should wear a face covering if possible, in accordance with local, state and federal requirements
 - Cloth face coverings should **NOT** be worn by babies and children under age two because of danger of suffocation.
 - CDC recommends all people 2 years of age and older wear a cloth face covering in public settings and when around people who don’t live in your household, especially when other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain.
 - If your staff does not have experience in using Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), [the CDC has recommended sequences for donning and doffing PPE](#).
 - Staff and children should wash their hands once they are admitted to the facility and upon leaving the facility.
 - Encourage staff and families not to linger or socialize in check-in areas.
 - Discourage handshaking.



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Enhanced Cleaning Practices and Ventilation

- Provide cleaning supplies for employees to utilize before/after they use common spaces and contact surfaces.
- Don't mix different EPA registered chemicals together. The combination could be toxic by inhalation.
 - Review product labels and Safety Data Sheets (SDSs) and follow manufacturer specifications for cleaning and surface contact duration.
 - Consider consulting an Industrial Hygiene expert if additional advice is needed. AIHA has a [consultants listing](#) of qualified Industrial Hygienists.
- All cleaning materials should be kept secure and out of reach of children.
- Disinfect all surfaces and commonly touched equipment and surfaces (e.g., toys, games, cubbies); educate employees on common facility high-touch surfaces (e.g., doorknobs, faucet handles, light switches, etc.)
 - All items should be allowed to dry thoroughly.
- Perform normal routine cleaning of outdoor areas, like playgrounds in schools and parks.
 - Do not spray disinfectant on outdoor playgrounds- it is not an efficient use of supplies and is not proven to reduce risk of COVID-19 to the public.
 - High touch surfaces made of plastic or metal, such as grab bars and railings, should be cleaned routinely.
 - Cleaning and disinfection of wooden surfaces (play structures, benches, tables) or groundcovers (mulch, sand) is not recommended.
- Do not disinfect sidewalks and roads.
 - Spread of COVID-19 from these surfaces is very low and disinfection is not effective.
- Develop strategies to minimize contact with commonly touched surfaces, and wash hands/utilize hand sanitizer before and after touching high-touch surfaces.
- Establish a disinfection routine so that common areas (e.g., lobby, sign-in station) can be cleaned and disinfected before and after children arrive and before and after children leave.
 - Disinfect all surfaces and commonly touched equipment (e.g., check-in/check-out tablets).
 - Consider using a checklist or audit system to track when and how cleaning is conducted.
 - Seating, doors, restrooms, common areas, etc. should be disinfected at the end of each day.
 - Do not use wet rag approach (use disposable products instead).
 - Use disposable paper towels or other artifacts to wipe surfaces clean. Hard surfaces can air dry rather than wiping.
 - Ensure disinfection protocols follow product instructions for application and contact time.
- Toys that can be put in the mouth should be cleaned and disinfected frequently and before being shared with another child. Set aside toys that need to be disinfected; washing with soapy water is the ideal method of cleaning. Toys that cannot be cleaned or disinfected should not be used. Rotate toys/games throughout the day for disinfecting.
- Do not share toys between groups of children, unless they have been washed and disinfected.
- Children's books and other paper-based materials are not considered a high risk for transmission and do not need additional cleaning or disinfection.
- Refer to [CFOC guidance](#) for national standards for cleaning, sanitizing and disinfection of educational facilities for children.
- Ensure there is an adequate flow of fresh air to childcare rooms and optimize the ventilation system settings. Some ways to do this or seek help:



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- Open doors and windows if possible.
- Maximize fresh air through your ventilation system.
- Maintain relative humidity at 40-60%.
- If you don't know how, ask an HVAC professional and see [ASHRAE](#) updates for more information.
- Consider using portable HEPA filtration units.
- If fans such as pedestal fans or hard mounted fans are used in the store, take steps to minimize air from fans blowing from one person directly at another individual. If fans are disabled or removed, employers should remain aware of, and take steps to prevent [heat hazards](#).

NOTE: Contact an occupational health and safety professional or ventilation specialist for advice on how to best utilize ventilation systems.

Diapering

- Conduct training for employees on diapering procedures and disinfection routines.
 - Consider providing infographic sheets or posting signage as a visual reminder of the appropriate protocol.
- When diapering, employees should follow good hygiene practice, including hand washing (child care provider and child), removing soiled trash, washing body parts that came in contact with child's secretions, and cleaning and disinfecting the diapering station with a sanitizing or disinfecting fragrance-free bleach solution.
- If possible, infants, toddlers, and employees should have multiple changes of clothes on hand in the childcare center.
 - Store each child's clothing separately.
 - Change the child's or employee's clothes if any secretions are on them.

- Employees should change their clothes if any child's secretions are on their clothes.
- Contaminated clothes should be placed in a plastic bag or washed in a washing machine.

Napping

- Cribs, cots, naptime mats and children's' bedding should be labeled for each child and stored separately.
- Use bedding that can be machine washed on high temperature settings. Wash bedding weekly, at a minimum and/or before use by another child, whichever comes first.
- Naptime mats or cribs should be spaced out as much as possible, at a minimum distance of 6 feet apart.
- If possible, arrange children head-to-toe to further reduce the potential for viral spread.
- Clean and disinfect nap pads or cribs daily.

Restrooms

- Doors to multi-stall restrooms should be able to be opened and closed without touching handles if possible.
- Place a trash can by the door if the door cannot be opened without touching the handle.
- For single restrooms, provide signage and materials (paper towels and trash cans) for individuals to use without touching the handles, and consider providing a key so disinfection measures can be better controlled. If a key is used, it should be disinfected after each use.
- Place signs above toilet lids (if present) to indicate that they should closed before flushing.
- Ensure that children wash their hands before and after using the restroom; place signage when appropriate.
- Provide paper towels and air dryers in restrooms.¹

¹NOTE VERSION CHANGE: In version 1 of this guidance document, in the section titled "Restrooms" it stated to disconnect or tape off the hand dryer.



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- The WHO and CDC currently state that hands can be dried using a paper towel or hand dryer.
 - Due to current uncertainties surrounding the transmission of SARS-CoV-2, care should be taken when using a hand dryer or paper towel.
 - The use of touch or push hand dryers is discouraged due to possible surface contamination. If hand dryers are used, consider touchless devices.
 - Businesses and employers should work with HVAC professionals to ensure that bathrooms are well ventilated.
 - Double efforts to keep bathrooms clean and properly disinfected. Maintain a record of sanitary work practices.
- Food Preparation and Feeding**
- Kitchen areas and equipment should be cleaned and disinfected daily (at a minimum); after cleaning, cutlery and dishware should be stored to prevent contamination.
 - The outside of dishwashers should be cleaned at the beginning and end of each shift.
 - All silverware and dinnerware should be cleaned in the dishwasher, when available.
 - Silverware should be stored in a way so that adjacent silverware is not easily touched when a provider is retrieving a piece.
 - If silverware and dishes cannot be kept clean and covered, disposable options are recommended.
 - Water/beverage faucets that require workers to operate them with their hands should be disinfected throughout the day.
 - Ice machines that require a handheld scoop should not be used, as it is difficult to control potential contamination in this case.
 - When preparing food for children, childcare providers must first wash their hands and then wear food-safe disposable gloves while preparing food.
- Food service and preparation should follow FDA guidance.
- All children, including infants, must wash hands before and after eating. Daycare providers who assist children in washing hands should wash their own hands after assisting a child.
 - If a cafeteria or communal dining facility is usually used, serve meals in classrooms instead. Avoid the use of shared serving utensils for snacks and meals. To the extent possible, for snacks and meals provided by the center, pre-packaged boxes or bags should be prepared for each child, rather than “buffet” or other family-style food serving.
 - Prior to meal or snack times, tables must be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected with an [EPA-registered household disinfectant](#) approved for use against the virus causing COVID-19. Diluted bleach (sodium hypochlorite) (5 tablespoons per gallon of water/4 teaspoons bleach per quart of water) can also be used for suitable surfaces according to the CDC, following the manufacturer’s guidance for usage and ensuring adequate ventilation.
 - Children should not share utensils, food, snacks, or drinks.
 - For younger children who require assistance with feeding, childcare providers must wash hands and put on disposable gloves. These gloves should be removed immediately after feeding, followed by another hand washing.
 - It is recommended that each night, parents be required to take home and thoroughly wash all bibs, bottles, bottle caps, nipples, food containers, utensils, and any other feeding items brought from home in hot, soapy water or in the dishwasher. During the day, used/empty bottles and other feeding items brought from home should be placed in each child’s cubby or bin, out of children’s reach.
 - Childcare providers should wash their hands after handling children’s’ bottles, cups, and food containers.



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- Tables should be thoroughly cleaned before and after meal/snack time.
- Stagger provider shifts, start times, and break times (as feasible).

Employee and Child Wellness

- Communicate to staff and families the importance of being vigilant for symptoms and staying in touch with facility management if or when they start to feel sick.
- Parents/caretakers/guardians should inform the childcare facility if they or the child has been diagnosed with or in contact with someone diagnosed with COVID-19.
- Establish routine, daily wellness health checks on arrival (such as temperature screening and symptom screening of both staff and children). Conduct screenings safely, respectfully, and with measures in place to ensure confidentiality, as well as in accordance with any applicable privacy laws or regulations):
 - Perform a temperature check to ensure that anyone with a fever is not admitted to the facility. Additional screening information/guidance can be found on the [CDC website](#).
 - Perform a visual inspection for other signs of illness (e.g., flushed cheeks, rapid or difficulty breathing without recent physical activity, fatigue, extreme fussiness, cough).
 - Persons who have a fever of 100°F (38°C) or above, or other signs of illness should not be admitted to the facility.
 - Have a plan if someone is sick.
 - Options for daily health check screenings for children are provided in [CDC’s supplemental Guidance for Child Care Programs that Remain Open](#) and in [CDC’s General Business FAQs](#) for screening staff.
- Keep sick staff/children separate from well staff/children until they can return home. Sick children should be picked up as soon as possible.
- Ask employees to consider the following if they commute to work using public transportation:
 - Use other forms of transportation.
 - Change their commute time to less busy times.
 - Wash their hands as soon as possible after their trip.
- Provide employees adequate time and access to soap, clean water, and single use paper towels for handwashing.
 - Remind employees to [wash their hands](#) often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, they should use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol. However, any use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers should follow local and State guidelines for schools or childcare facilities.
 - Ensure adequate supplies (e.g., soap, paper towels, hand sanitizer, tissues) to support healthy hygiene practices.
- [Post signs and reminders](#) at entrances and in strategic places providing instruction on hand hygiene, respiratory hygiene, and cough etiquette. This should include signs for non-English speakers, as needed.
- Use no-touch waste receptacles when possible.
- Remind employees to avoid touching their eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Remind employees if someone coughs or sneezes, they should cover their mouth and nose with a tissue or use the inside of their elbow. Throw used tissues in the trash and immediately wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer. Learn more about [coughing and sneezing](#) etiquette.
- Remind employees that people may be able to spread COVID-19 even if they do not show symp-



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toms. Consider all close interactions (within 6 feet) with staff, children, parents, and others as a potential source of exposure.

- Childcare providers should wear a cloth face covering to cover their nose and mouth in all areas of the childcare facility.
 - Teach and reinforce use of cloth face coverings among all staff. Face coverings are most essential in times when physical distancing is not possible. Staff should be frequently reminded not to touch the face covering and to wash their hands frequently. Information should be provided to all staff on proper use, removal, and washing of cloth face coverings. Additional information on cloth masks can be found here on the [website of CDC](#).
 - Cloth face coverings may prevent people who do not know they have the virus from transmitting it to others; these face coverings are not surgical masks, respirators, or personal protective equipment (PPE).
 - Cloth face coverings should NOT be placed on young children under age 2, anyone who has trouble breathing, or is unconscious, incapacitated, or otherwise unable to remove the mask without assistance.

NOTE: If an employer chooses to provide an N95 respirator, please fully consider all the potential OSHA requirements.

Training

- Employers should notify employees of new workplace policies and changes prior to reopening and upon resuming operations.
- Train employees on new or modified working schedules, how they can stay up to date on new scheduling requirements, and how to make requests for schedule changes if a need arises.

- Employees should receive, at minimum, awareness training on cleaning and disinfection products used in the workplace following OSHA Hazard Communication Standards. For employees who will use disinfectants and cleaners, training should also include proper use, PPE, disposal, and all precautionary measures
- Health checks and reporting requirements of individuals infected with COVID-19 should be explained to employees prior to reopening and again once operations have resumed.
 - Employees should evaluate their health constantly; if they are sick, have a fever, symptoms, or someone at home is sick then they should remain home. **NOTE: Employer HR Policies, HIPAA guidelines and other laws should be followed at all times.**

Waste and Laundering

- Single-use items and used disinfection materials can be treated as regular waste, following regular safety guidelines.
- Any reusable cloth materials can be washed with detergent and dried on the highest temperature setting for the fabric.
- Ensure all commercial laundry services are aware of the potential for SARS CoV-2 viral exposure before laundering.

Communication

- Communicate to the staff, children (when appropriate), and families about what is being done to mitigate the spread of COVID-19.
 - (e.g., disinfection routine, health policies for staff, physical distancing, and health and safety measures in place).
- Consider communicating the visible symptoms of COVID-19 exposure.
- Understand that childcare facilities have the right to refuse any childcare service if the child is exhib-



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iting symptoms of illness.

- Platforms for verbal/written communication can include the use of social media, websites, and posting information on indoor/outdoor bulletins.
- Upon arrival and throughout the day, communicate the importance of good personal hygiene to children (i.e., hand washing, covering nose and mouth when sneezing or coughing, not sharing food, etc.).

Other Control Measures

- Although perhaps not necessary if hand-washing protocols are rigorously followed, consider providing disposable gloves to staff, especially when cleaning and disinfecting the building, removing waste materials, and cleaning the restrooms.
 - If gloves are worn, they must be changed regularly, and they are not a substitution for hand-washing.
 - Remove or replace any gloves that are torn or damaged. Users should check their gloves frequently to avoid exposure.
- Plan for staff absences by developing flexible attendance and sick-leave policies, plan for alternative coverage, and monitor and track COVID-19 related staff absences.
- Stay informed about local COVID-19 information and updates in your geographic area.

What should a childcare **Employee do** to protect themselves and children attending the childcare facility?

- Evaluate your health constantly. If you are sick, stay home. If you have a temperature, stay home. If someone at home is sick or you came into contact with someone who became sick, stay home. If you have allergies or other medical illness, stay home. **NOTE: Employer HR Policies, HIPAA guidelines and other laws should be followed at all times.**

- Wear a face covering when in public and during the workday and maintain physical distancing with childcare parents and other family members during drop-off and pick-up.
- Wash your hands when you arrive at work, throughout the day after various activities (e.g., before and after preparing food, before and after administering medication, after handling garbage, before and after diapering, after using the bathroom or helping a child to do so, etc.), after touching your face covering, when you leave work, and when you arrive home.
- Let your employer know if you have concerns about the PPE that may be provided to you and that you are properly instructed on how to use it.
- Attempt to delay the urge to sneeze or cough if possible; carry a disposable towel or handkerchief towel, so if you get the urge to sneeze or cough, cover your nose, mouth and mask with it and then, attempt to delay the urge to sneeze or cough, immediately leave the premises to wash your hands and face thoroughly before returning. Disposable towels and handkerchiefs should never be placed on a surface within the childcare facility and should be kept in a sealable bag. Clean and contaminated items should be kept separate.
- Employees should use different bathrooms than the ones children use.

What can **Parents/Guardians/Caregivers do** to minimize the transmission of COVID-19?

- Evaluate you and your child's health constantly. If either of you are sick, stay home. If either of you have a temperature, stay home. If someone at home is sick or you came into contact with someone who became sick, stay home and keep your child home too. If you have allergies or other medical illnesses, stay home.



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- Parents/caretakers/guardians should inform the childcare facility if they or the child has been diagnosed with or in contact with someone diagnosed with COVID-19.
- Report your symptoms/diagnosis by telephone, text, or email to those persons in charge or part of the childcare facility. Don't go to childcare facility to verbally discuss this matter in person.
- Wear a face covering when out in public and maintain physical distancing (maintain 6-feet of separation from others) during drop-off and pick-up.
- Wash your hands throughout the day, after drop-off, and before pick up (if feasible), and after touching your face or face covering.
- Carry a towel; if you get the urge to sneeze or cough, cover your nose, mouth and mask, in an attempt to prevent the spread of droplets or aerosol transmission. If the symptoms persist, leave immediately. Wash your hands and face thoroughly before going back to work or re-entering the childcare facility.

Resources

- [Association for Early Learning Leaders.](#)
- [CDC General Business Frequently Asked Questions website.](#)
- [CDC Interim Guidance for Administrators of US K-12 Schools and Child Care Programs website.](#)
- [CDC Guidance for Schools and Child Care Programs website.](#)
- [CDC Cleaning and Disinfection for Community Facilities website.](#)
- [CDC Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility Everyday Steps, Steps When Someone is Sick, and Considerations for Employers website.](#)
- [CDC K-12 Schools and Child Care Programs: FAQs for Administrators, Teachers, and Parents website.](#)
- [CDC COVID-19 and Children FAQ website.](#)
- [CDC Schools and Child Care Programs: Checklist for Teachers and Parents website.](#)
- [CDC Guidance for Child Care Programs that Remain Open - Supplemental Guidance website.](#)
- [CDC Cleaning and Disinfection for Non-emergency Transport Vehicles: Interim Recommendations for U.S. Non-emergency Transport Vehicles that May Have Transported Passengers with Suspected/Confirmed Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) website.](#)
- [CDC Talking with Children about Coronavirus Disease 2019 website.](#)
- [CDC Considerations for School Closure website.](#)
- [WHO Key Messages and Actions for COVID-19 Prevention and Control in Schools website.](#)



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About Occupational Health and Safety Professionals

Occupational health and safety (OHS) professionals (also known as industrial hygienists) practice

the science of anticipating, recognizing, evaluating, and controlling workplace conditions that may cause workers' injury or illness. Through a continuous improvement cycle of planning, doing, checking and acting, OHS professionals make sure workplaces are healthy and safe.

Get additional resources at AIHA's [Coronavirus Outbreak Resource Center](#).

Find a qualified industrial hygiene and OEHS professionals near you in our [Consultants Listing](#).

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These guidance documents were primarily developed for those smaller business that don't have readily available occupational health and safety resources, and designed to help business owners, employers, employees and consumers implement science-backed procedures for limiting the spread of the coronavirus. They are subject to any local, state, or federal directives, laws, or orders about operating a business and should only be used if they do not conflict with any such orders.

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