

EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION PROGRAMS CLOSURE AND DISMISSAL DURING A NOVEL CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK

**Technical Guidance for Child Care, Head Start and public and private
Prekindergarten Education Programs**

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Issued by the Vermont Department of Health, the Vermont Agency of Education, and the
Department for Children and Families



VERMONT

**DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
AGENCY OF EDUCATION
DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES**

Introduction

The Vermont Department of Health has developed this guidance to assist child care, Head Start and public and private PreK education programs with their response to 2019 novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak. While the situation is evolving, we believe that those over 60, with compromised immune systems or those with chronic medical conditions may be at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19. Schools and child care facilities have experience managing respiratory infections and outbreaks among children and staff and should apply the same outbreak management principles to COVID-19. Additional resources on how schools and child care facilities can prepare for and manage COVID-19 can be found [on the CDC website](#):

Child care facilities are encouraged to use prevention and mitigation strategies rather than closing facilities until there is evidence that a case is linked to the program or child care facility in some way.

While any closure decision is the responsibility of the child care facility and its leadership, any decision for school closure due to COVID-19 risk should be informed by guidance from the Vermont Department of Health.

Prepare

- **Stay informed about the local COVID-19 situation.** Know where to turn for reliable, up-to-date information. Monitor the [CDC COVID-19 website](#) and the [Vermont Department of Health website](#) for the latest information.
- **Develop, or review, your emergency response plan.** Ensure your facility has a plan that includes strategies to reduce the spread of disease and establishes mechanisms for ongoing communication with staff, children, volunteers, families, and the community. This should be done in collaboration with local health departments and other relevant partners.
- **Monitor and plan for absenteeism.** A COVID-19 outbreak in your community could lead to staff and children being absent. Prepare alternative staffing plans to ensure as many of your staff are available as possible. See the [Department of Health's Resources for schools, child care programs and colleges and Guidance for businesses](#) sections for more specific information.
- **Establish relationships with key healthcare and public health partners in your community.** Make sure you know about healthcare and public health emergency planning and response activities in your community and establish open lines of communication with leadership in your region. For contact information for your local health office, visit: healthvermont.gov/local
- **Update an emergency contact list.** Update emergency contact lists for families, staff and key resources and ensure the lists are accessible in key locations in your facility. For example, know how to reach your local or state health department in an emergency.
- **Develop a communications plan.** A key component to being prepared is developing a communication plan that outlines how you plan to reach different audiences (e.g.

families, staff, community) including ensuring all communications are culturally and linguistically appropriate as well as accessible for individuals with disabilities.

Communicate

- **Communicate about COVID-19 with your staff.** Share information about what is currently known about COVID-19 and your program's emergency response plans. Communicate your expectations for modeling respiratory etiquette, staying home when sick, and supporting employees who need to take care of a sick family members.
- **Communicate about COVID-19 families.** Provide updates about changes to your policies or operations. Use all communication channels available to you, including direct communications (face-to-face, letters), electronic communications (your program's website or social media pages), and parent meetings to share updates. *It is critical to maintain confidentiality for staff and children.* Make sure to plan ahead for linguistic needs, including providing interpreters and translating materials.
- **Intentionally and persistently combat stigma.** Misinformation about coronavirus and COVID-19 can create fear and hostility that hurts people and makes it harder to keep everyone healthy. We're stronger as a community when we stand together against discrimination. Take advantage of these [resources](#) to prevent, interrupt, and respond to stigma.

Prevent

- **Encourage sick individuals to stay home.** Instruct all staff, children, families, and volunteers to self-screen at home. If children or staff become sick while at your program, keep sick individuals separate from well children and staff until they can leave. Ensure that your sick leave policies are flexible and consistent with public health guidance and that staff are aware of these policies.
 - If individuals have fever, cough or shortness of breath and have not been around anyone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19, they should stay home away from others until 72 hours after the fever is gone and symptoms get better.
 - If an individual believes they have had close contact to someone with COVID-19 but are not currently sick, they should monitor their health for fever, cough, and shortness of breath during the 14 days after the last day they were in close contact with the sick person with COVID-19. They should not go to work, child care, or school and should avoid public places for 14 days.
- **Post signs.** As part of routine measures for the respiratory season, existing [signs](#) should be visible that reminds staff, visitors, and children to perform hand hygiene (sneeze/cough into their elbow, put used tissues in a waste receptacle and to wash hands immediately after using tissues). Recommend everyone to avoid close greetings like hugs or handshakes.
- **Perform routine environmental cleaning.** Follow the program's routine cleaning and disinfecting practices. Clean and [disinfect](#) frequently touched objects and surfaces. Ensure that all objects that children put in their mouths are cleaned and disinfected before another child is allowed to play / use it.

- **Emphasize normally recommended actions to prevent the spread of disease.** You can help children and staff reduce their risk for getting and spreading viral respiratory infections by encouraging them to take simple steps which will also prevent COVID-19. These include:
 - Frequent hand washing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom, before eating, and after they blow their nose. Help young children do the same. If hands are visibly dirty, use soap and water to clean hands.
 - If soap and water are not readily available, using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.
 - Advise children and staff to avoid touching their eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
 - Cover coughs or sneezes with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash and clean hands with soap and water or hand sanitizer (if soap and water are not readily available).
 - Provide adequate supplies for good hygiene (including cleaning handwashing sinks) such as soap, paper towels, and alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

Mitigate

- **If there is an identified case of COVID-19 in your community, work in close collaboration and coordination with the [Vermont Department of Health](#) to make decisions regarding measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19.**
- **Communicate about potential exposure to COVID-19.** It is critical to maintain confidentiality for staff and children while working to address potential fear and anxiety of families and staff.
- **Determine if, when, and for how long it may be appropriate to dismiss school and child care programs.** In general, schools and child care facilities should only close if a child, staff member, administrator, or family child care household member has been diagnosed with a confirmed case of COVID-19.
 - The length of time a child care program should be closed or dismissed will vary depending on the severity of risk. Child care program directors / owners and family child care providers should seek guidance from the Vermont Department of Health to determine when children and staff should return to the child care program and what additional steps are needed to protect the child care program. CDC Guidelines for cleaning and disinfection can be found at: [healthychildren.org](https://www.healthychildren.org)
 - It is not recommended to close schools or child care facilities for cleaning if there are no confirmed cases of COVID-19 associated with the facility or child care program.
- **Assess the impacts of any decisions you make on the families you serve.** There are equity implications for any decision you may make, and the families you work with will

be able to provide you the best feedback on and guidance on how to move forward in a child- and family-centered way.

- **For family child cares, you are reminded to** use existing practices of separating sick family members or caregivers from children in your care.

Social Isolation and Monitoring of At-Risk Children and Staff

Potential COVID-19 exposures can create situations where patients are monitored by local health officials and occasionally asked to take social isolation steps. The Vermont Department of Health currently recommends that persons who are returning from China, Iran, Italy, South Korea or Japan immediately contact the Department of Health. Current CDC guidance suggests that travelers from China, Iran, Italy and South Korea stay home and limit contact with anyone outside the home for 14 days from the last day in the affected country. Travelers returning from Japan should monitor their health for 14 days after returning to the United States.

Resources

Questions about COVID-19? **Dial 2-1-1**

[Vermont Department of Health COVID-19 site](#)

[Parent and Caretaker guide for helping families cope with COVID 19](#)

[Just For Kids: A Comic Exploring The New Coronavirus](#)

[Talking to Children About COVID-19 \(Coronavirus\) - A Parent Resource \(English Resource\)](#)

[Talking to Children About COVID-19 \(Coronavirus\) - A Parent Resource \(Spanish Resource\)](#)