COVID-19 Safety in Child Care Facilities
(Updated January 2022)

Childcare is an essential community service. It supports preparing children for the future and enables parents and caregivers to work. A safe childcare environment is an important contributor to a child’s social and emotional development. During the pandemic, many childcare providers were prompted to enhance their best practices to reduce the risks of spread of COVID-19 virus. Central District Health (CDH) recognizes and values their contribution in keeping children in their facilities and our communities safe during this challenging time. The intent of this document is to support childcare providers in these efforts and help them stay up to date on current recommendations for prevention and mitigation of the spread.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), children can be infected with the virus that causes COVID-19, get sick from COVID-19, and spread the virus to others even if they never develop symptoms or have mild, non-specific symptoms (e.g., headache, sore throat). Although children are less likely to develop severe illness or die from COVID-19 and its variants, cases of severe COVID-19 illness and deaths among children and adolescents have been documented and reported.

Vaccination is currently the best public health prevention strategy to control the COVID-19 pandemic. People 5 years and older are now eligible for COVID-19 vaccination, and children 12 and older can get a Pfizer-BioNtech booster shot when eligible. Promoting vaccination can help childcare programs continue to provide in-person learning and care. As children younger than 5 are not yet eligible for COVID-19 vaccination, protecting unvaccinated individuals is one of the most important things for childcare providers to keep in mind when implementing COVID-19 prevention strategies. The CDC recommends that the following factors are also taken into consideration:

- Level of local community transmission of COVID-19.
- COVID-19 vaccination coverage in the community and among children and staff.
- COVID-19 outbreaks in childcare facilities or the surrounding community.
- Strain on health system capacity for the community.
- Ages of children served and the associated social and behavioral factors that may affect risk of transmission and the feasibility of different prevention strategies.

Current COVID-19 transmission rates and vaccine information can be found on the CDH website.

The CDC’s guidance outlines several strategies childcare programs can use to maintain healthy environments and healthy operations, and to lower the risk of COVID-19 spread in their facilities.

**Physical Distancing**

Childcare programs where not everyone is fully vaccinated should implement physical distancing, to the extent possible, indoors. Because of the essential nature of their service, childcare programs should not exclude children from in-person care to keep a minimum distance requirement.

Maintaining physical distance is often not feasible in childcare settings, especially during certain activities (e.g., diapering, feeding, holding/comforting, etc.) and among younger children in general. When it is not
possible to maintain physical distance, it is especially important to layer multiple prevention strategies, such as cohorting, masking indoors, improved ventilation, handwashing, covering coughs and sneezes, and regular cleaning to help reduce transmission risk. Mask use by people who are not fully vaccinated is particularly important when physical distance cannot be maintained. A distance of at least 6 feet is recommended between adults who are not fully vaccinated.

Handwashing and Respiratory Etiquette

Individuals should practice handwashing and respiratory etiquette (covering coughs and sneezes) to keep from spreading infectious illnesses including COVID-19. Childcare providers can monitor and reinforce these behaviors and provide adequate handwashing supplies.

- Teach and reinforce handwashing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If handwashing is not possible, use hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol. Hand sanitizers should be stored up, away, and out of sight of young children and should be used only with adult supervision for children under 6 years of age.
- Remind everyone in the facility to wash hands frequently and assist young children with handwashing.
- Post signs and graphics that describe how to stop the spread of germs in important facility locations such as entrances and restrooms. Signs should be easy to understand, use pictures, and be in primary languages spoken by your staff and families. https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communication/print-resources.html?Sort=Date%3A%3Adesc
- Set up hand hygiene stations at facility entrances.

Correct Mask Use

Consistent and correct mask use by people who are not fully vaccinated is especially important indoors and when physical distancing cannot be maintained.

- Indoors: Mask use is recommended for people who are not fully vaccinated, including children and staff. Children under 2 years of age should not wear a mask.
- Outdoors: In general, people do not need to wear masks when outdoors. However, particularly in areas of substantial to high transmission, CDC recommends that people age 2 and older who are not fully vaccinated wear a mask in crowded outdoor settings or during activities that involve sustained close contact with other people who are not fully vaccinated.

Childcare facilities may implement universal masking if they have increasing, substantial, or high COVID-19 transmission in their program or community, and while they serve a population not yet eligible for vaccination.

Cleaning and Disinfection

Cleaning once a day is usually enough to sufficiently remove potential virus that may be on surfaces. However, in addition to cleaning for COVID-19, childcare programs should follow recommended procedures for cleaning, sanitizing, and disinfection in their setting (e.g., after diapering, feeding, and exposure to bodily fluids). For general information on cleaning a facility regularly, when to clean more
frequently or disinfect, cleaning a facility when someone is sick, safe storage of cleaning and disinfecting products, and considerations for protecting workers who clean facilities, see Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility.

**Ventilation**

Improving ventilation is an important COVID-19 prevention strategy that can reduce the number of virus particles in the air. Along with other preventive strategies, including wearing a mask, bringing fresh outdoor air into a building helps keep virus particles from concentrating inside. This can be done by opening multiple doors and windows, using child-safe fans to increase the effectiveness of open windows, and making changes to the HVAC or air filtration systems. During transportation, open or crack windows in buses and other forms of transportation, if doing so does not pose a safety risk. Keeping windows open a few inches improves air circulation.

**Staying Home when Sick and Getting Tested**

Children and staff who have symptoms of infectious illness, such as influenza (flu) or COVID-19, should stay home and be referred to their healthcare provider for testing and care. Staying home when sick with COVID-19 is essential to keeping COVID-19 infections out of your facility and preventing spread to others.

Encourage your families and staff to be on the alert for signs of illness in children and adults, and to stay home when they are sick or have been exposed to someone who is sick. Parents and staff should pay particular attention to:

- Fever (temperature 100.4 °F or higher)
- Sore throat
- New uncontrolled cough that causes difficulty breathing (for a child with chronic allergic/asthmatic cough, see if there is a change from their usual cough)
- Diarrhea, vomiting, or stomachache
- New onset of severe headache, especially with a fever

People who have a fever of 100.4 °F (38.0 °C) or above or other signs of illness should not be admitted to your facility.

The length of time the child or staff member should stay out of the facility depends on whether the individual has COVID-19 or another illness. In most instances, those who have COVID-19 can be around others after:

- 10 days since symptoms first appeared, and
- 24 hours with no fever without the use of fever-reducing medications, and
- Other symptoms of COVID-19 are improving

Children and adults who test positive for COVID-19 but do not have symptoms can be around others 10 days after their first positive COVID-19 test.
Whether and for how long to stay home for people who have been exposed to a person with COVID-19 depends on vaccination status. Childcare providers and administrators should educate staff and families about when they and their children should stay home and when they can return to their facility. CDC’s Quarantine and Isolation Guideline is a good source of information on this topic: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/quarantine-isolation.html. CDH’s Quarantine and Isolation Calculator is another helpful tool: https://cdhd.idaho.gov/covid-calculator.php.

Shortened isolation and quarantine recommendations are available but not without increased risk, and mask use is imperative. For children within a childcare setting unable to mask, shortened recommendations should not be considered. Children and staff able to wear a mask may consider shortened quarantine and isolation recommendations. See CDH’s Quarantine and Isolation Calculator for additional details: https://cdhd.idaho.gov/covid-calculator.php.

Please keep in mind that your children or staff might begin to have COVID-19 symptoms while at your facility. You should take action to isolate people who begin to have these symptoms from other children and staff. Plan to have an isolation room or an area, preferably with access to a separate restroom, that you can use to isolate a sick child or staff member. Ensure that isolated children are still under adult supervision. Arrange safe transportation home or to a healthcare facility (if severe symptoms) for the child or staff if showing symptoms of COVID-19. See CDC’s Toolkit for Child Care Programs for more resources on what to do if a child becomes sick while at the child care program.

Getting tested for COVID-19 will help with rapid contact tracing and prevent possible spread, especially if key prevention strategies (masking and distancing) are not in use. Please visit this page to locate a testing site near you: https://my.castlighthealth.com/corona-virus-testing-sites/.

Idaho Department of Health and Welfare (IDHW) requires providers to report all positive COVID-19 cases. Please call Idaho 211 (1-800-926-2588) for all reporting needs. Please keep in mind that childcare facilities are required to report if you or anyone living in your home or working in your facility has a communicable disease that might pose a threat to the safety of a child.

**Additional Considerations**

Additionally, childcare providers and administrators may consider:

- Provisions for Diapering, Holding, Washing, and Feeding Children
- Provisions for Safe Transport during COVID-19
- Provisions for Children with Disabilities or Other Healthcare Needs
- Provisions for Parents and Visitors
- Provisions for Food Service and Meals
- Toothbrushing
- Playgrounds and Physically Active Play
- Water Systems

For more information, please visit https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/child-care-guidance.html
Communication

Stay in regular communication with all parents, children, staff, and volunteers about steps everyone can take to protect themselves and prevent further spread. Provide staff and families with a way to communicate with facility, receive information and updates, and voice concerns.

Childcare providers should contact IDHW licensing staff to notify them of a proposed change in business practices and/or seek guidance to a proposed change in response to COVID-19. Childcare Program and State Licensing policy staff may be reached by calling Idaho CareLine 211 (1-800-926-2588).

Anyone considering creating childcare specifically to serve working families should call 2-1-1 (1-800-926-2588), the Idaho CareLine, and ask to speak to the Child Care Licensing Program Specialist or ICCP Program Specialist. These IDHW staff members will be working in coordination with providers, public health districts, and local officials to ensure access to childcare while maintaining health and safety for children.

Resources

COVID-19 Guidance for Operating Early Care and Education/Child Care Programs