

COVID-19 Guidance for Child Care Providers and the Early Learning Community

Updated March 25, 2020

*Update: On March 23, Governor Jay Inslee announced the “Stay Home, Stay Healthy” order. **At this time, child cares are open for children of essential workers or vulnerable children who do not have alternative care. Parents who can keep their children home or arrange for other care need to do so.** Child cares should not be used for socializing children for a few hours a day or because the parent(s) needs quiet time to work at home. If parents are working remotely, their children should be home with them. While socializing is important, this is not the time to have children in groups when it is not absolutely necessary. Social distancing is essential to slow the spread of COVID-19.*

Child care is particularly important and must be available for our medical workers, first responders, and others serving vital functions during this public health emergency, as well as for those who cannot work from home and do not have other child care options. It is important, however, to note that schools were closed in an effort to prevent the coronavirus from spreading. Child care providers should engage in a discussion with parents and encourage those parents who are able to keep their children at home to do so.

The COVID-19 situation is rapidly evolving, so we encourage you to monitor the Snohomish Health District’s website at www.snohd.org/ncov2019. The Washington State Department of Children, Youth and Family (DCYF) is also providing updated information, guidance and resources on their website at <https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/coronavirus-covid-19>.

In the meantime, this document is intended to provide some guidance for child care and early learning facilities to follow.

What should we be doing to prepare?

It is important that child cares are talking to families about the possibility of extended closures. Parents should have back up plans for care if they are unable to stay home from work. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has developed checklists for child cares and parents to help them prepare. Please review these lists and share them with parents: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/checklist.html>

What are things that my child care can be doing to prevent the spread of illness?

- Any child or staff member who is sick must stay home. We have a poster available to inform parents: <https://www.snohd.org/DocumentCenter/View/3406/Keep-Sick-Children-Home-COVID19---031020?bidId=> Post this document at all entrances. For more information about COVID-19 symptoms, please see [our general FAQ](#).
- Employees/workers should ensure they are fever-free and asymptomatic before leaving home and reporting for work. Here is an employee [screening checklist from Washington State Department of Health](#). If staff do not have fever or respiratory symptoms they may report to work. While at work, if they develop fever (measured temperature >100.4 F or subjective fever) OR respiratory symptoms like a sore throat, cough, or difficulty breathing, they should:
 - immediately self-isolate (separate themselves from others);
 - notify their supervisor if applicable;

- go home and stay home until 7 days after symptom onset or 72 hours after symptoms resolve, **whichever is longer**; and
 - if symptoms persist or worsen, call their health care provider for further guidance.
- Conduct daily health checks of children when they arrive. The child care should take children's temperatures with a clean and disinfected thermometer or parents should be advised to take children's temperatures before leaving the house and report temperature to child care upon arrival. Ask parents about symptoms, including cough, difficulty breathing, sore throat, or body ache or other flu-like symptoms, which may have begun since the last time they were in care. If children are coughing or have other significant respiratory symptoms, they should go home and follow steps as indicated above for employees.
 - Child care facilities should set up a separate space to isolate children who become ill with respiratory symptoms while at child care until families can pick them up.
 - Ask parents at drop off if there are family members sick with symptoms consistent with COVID-19 at home. If yes, the child should also stay home.
 - Ill family members or home care providers should not enter the facility.
- Children at high risk for severe complications from COVID-19, such as those with compromised immune systems or respiratory conditions like severe asthma, should stay home. When in doubt, have parents consult the child's doctor for guidance.
- Child care providers and staff in high risk categories, including those age 60 or over, those with compromised immune systems, those with underlying health conditions, and those who are pregnant, should stay home or be excluded from daily operations.
 - NOTE: Small child cares or in-home providers who have owners/operators in high risk categories that cannot be excluded and who do not have licensed staff on hand in order to remain operational should strongly consider closing. If a child care center has a large percentage of employees in high risk categories who stay at home, they may need to close due an inability to meet licensing ratios.
- Children who have family members in high risk categories should be encouraged to stay at home to avoid spreading the disease to vulnerable individuals.
- Limit the number of people who enter your child care facility. Restrict visitors and volunteers. Develop a plan to hand off children to families in the foyer or at the door. If parents are ill, the child should not be admitted to the program and should return home with the parent.
- Incorporate social distancing into your classroom programming, aiming for at least 3-6' between children as much as feasible. This includes things like:
 - limiting the number of children at each learning center or station in the classroom to one or two at a time, if possible
 - incorporate more individual work into the classroom
 - increasing the distance between children in circle time, meals and snacks, or during table work

- plan activities that do not require close physical contact between individual children
 - increase spacing between nap mats to six feet if possible. If that is not possible, space nap mats as far apart as possible and place children in a toe-to-toe or head-to-toe arrangement
 - Incorporating additional outside time and opening windows frequently or adjusting the HVAC system to allow for more fresh air to enter classrooms.
- Reduce the group size and mixing of children and staff. Keeping children and staff consistent during the duration of the outbreak will help reduce the potential exposures and may prevent an entire child care from shutting down if an exposure does occur. Ways to do this include:
 - keeping the number of children and staff in each group or classroom as low as possible, with no more than 10 people total in a group (i.e. two adults and eight children)
 - keeping staff consistent for the duration of the outbreak event as much as possible
 - not combining groups of children at opening and closing
 - alternating drop off and pick up times for each classroom (if your program has a set start time) to avoid a large number of people congregating outside the facility
 - staggering outdoor time for each individual classroom
 - for centers that have a central eating area, consider having children eat in their individual classroom. If this is not possible, stagger eating times.
 - Minimize the potential for the spread of germs in the classroom environment by:
 - temporarily removing toys that are not easily cleanable such as stuffed animals and pillows
 - rotating the toys that are out at any one particular time so that they can be adequately cleaned and sanitized
 - temporarily suspending family style meal service
 - discontinuing toothbrushing activities
 - In infant rooms, use a separate blanket to hold each baby and use individual blankets on the floor. Avoid getting close to babies' and toddlers' faces when holding them.
 - encouraging physical activity that allows for adequate social distancing and doesn't rely on materials that will need disinfecting. [See our guidance document for ideas.](#)
 - Increase frequency of handwashing and routine cleaning, sanitizing and disinfecting throughout the day. Require handwashing upon entering the classroom, before meals, after time outside, and prior to leaving for home. Monitor children's handwashing to make sure they are doing it effectively.

What cleaning and disinfection protocols should we be following?

Continue with your normal cleaning, sanitizing, and disinfecting procedures throughout the day following licensing guidance, but increasing the frequency of cleaning/disinfecting high touch surfaces.

Conduct thorough cleaning and disinfection of high touch surfaces each night after the children leave. Current guidance for environmental cleaning and disinfection can be found on the CDC's

website: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/cleaning-disinfection.html>

This guidance specifies that disinfectants used should be registered by the EPA for emerging pathogens (<https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2>) or, if a bleach water mixture is used, the disinfectant (green label) should be mixed at a concentration of 4 teaspoons per quart. This higher level of bleach disinfecting solution can replace the normal diapering/bathroom solution at this time. The disinfectant should be used on high touch surfaces throughout the day when children are not in the immediate area and when proper ventilation can be ensured.

What if there is a confirmed or suspected case associated with the child care?

Child cares experiencing a confirmed case of COVID-19 among their population, or having a high rate of absenteeism (more than 10%) due to flu-like symptoms, or those consistent with COVID-19, should consider closing at least temporarily (e.g., for 14 days, or possibly longer if advised by local health officials). The duration may be dependent on staffing levels, outbreak levels in the community, and severity of illness in children. It is important that we mitigate against students or staff moving to another facility, potentially exposing others. Contact your local health department for guidance.

If the child care has an individual with confirmed or suspected COVID-19 who spent minimal time (i.e. 10 minutes or less) in close contact with someone in the child care setting or if there are multiple individuals who were close contacts of a known case who spent time in the child care but were not symptomatic, the child care may consider closing for 2-5 days to do a thorough cleaning and disinfecting and check for ill individuals.

The Snohomish Health District has also developed a [table that provides guidance](#) on what to do if employees or family members/close contacts of employees or children are sick and/or are being tested.

What should I do if I think I may have been exposed or may be sick with coronavirus?

A document from the Snohomish Health District provides guidance (in multiple languages) on what to do if you were exposed to someone with COVID-19 at:

<https://www.snohd.org/502/What-to-do-if-you-were-exposed>

The Washington State Department of Health also has developed guidance for various situations.

- [What to do if you have confirmed or suspected coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\) \(PDF\)](#)
- [What to do if you were potentially exposed to someone with confirmed coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\) \(PDF\)](#)
- [What to do if you have symptoms of coronavirus disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) and have not been around anyone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19 \(PDF\)](#)

Where can I get the most current information?

The situation with COVID-19 is rapidly evolving. To ensure that you have the most up to date information please check the Snohomish Health District website frequently at www.snohd.org/ncov2019.

You can also find helpful information and resources at:

CDC

- General information: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/>
- Schools and Child Care: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/index.html>

Washington State Department of Health:

- General Information: <https://www.doh.wa.gov/Emergencies/Coronavirus>
- Schools and Child Care: <https://www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/1600/coronavirus/1-RecommendationsChildCareandSchools.pdf>